The Life and Ministry of Christ, Part 10

As the Sermon on the Mount continues, Jesus discusses the believer's attitude toward wealth, things that we value and their influence over our lives. Our attitude toward wealth and material possessions reveals much about our relationship with God and personal righteousness. Our attitude and perspective is a demonstration of our relationship with God.

Treasure – Matthew 6:19-21

Matthew 6:19–21 NKJV Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

This concerns more than earthly possessions. The way people use wealth and the things they treasure is an indication of the condition of their heart. The Lord's concern is how the possessions of this world control our lives. Rather than centering our lives around money, possessions, and material things, He wants us to focus our lives around Him and heaven. The things of this life are transient and quickly age, die, deteriorate, and decay. We have them for only a brief moment and then they fade and are gone. Earthly treasures are insecure, easily lost, can be stolen, eaten away, and do not last.

1 Timothy 6:7 NKJV For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

What kind of treasure can we store up in heaven?

Early on in His lesson on wealth and treasure, we are told to lay up treasures in heaven. Earthly riches are easier to focus on because they are the things that we see and rely on for daily life. This reference does not mean that it is sinful to provide for yourself and your family.

1 Timothy 5:8 NKJV But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

How do we balance providing for our own and laying up treasure in heaven?

Jesus is telling us to get our priorities straight.

Luke 12:15 NKJV And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."

Matthew 6:21 NKJV For where your treasure is, there your heart will be

also.

What does it mean, "there your heart will be also?"

Your focus in life is where your heart is. The Lord is not prohibiting material possessions or the enjoyment of things in life, but He is addressing a selfish and over emphasis on earthly treasures. This gets back to the emphasis of verse 20, *"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."* Our major emphasis in life should be toward God. Jesus explains this in the next paragraph.

Matthew 6:22–23 NKJV The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

What does that mean? There is an illustration of this in Abraham and Lot in Genesis 13:5-18. Both Abraham and Lot's possessions were so great they could not dwell together because the land could not support them. Abraham gave Lot the option to choose where he would go.

Genesis 13:9 NKJV Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me. If you take the left, then I will go to the right; or, if you go to the right, then I will go to the left.

When Lot lifted his eyes, he saw the well-watered plain around Sodom and Gomorrah. It looked like the garden of God, but Sodom was exceedingly wicked and sinful. Lot's focus was on the things of this world. Notice the difference in Abraham.

Hebrews 11:10 ESV For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Abraham was much like King David. Both of them were extremely wealthy and had many possessions, but the focus of their lives was God. David constantly spoke of the Lord and the joy he had of dwelling in the house of the Lord.

Matthew 6:23 NKJV But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

Jesus was referring to living a life guided by proper desires and appetites. The "bad eye" is guided by wrong desires, interests, and darkness. The Greek word ponēros (πονηρός), means: "bad, wicked, evil." The word is most commonly used to describe a wicked or evil person or being, an evildoer. The "good eye" is guided by God's interests and light.

What was wrong with Lot's choices?

Lot was not being guided by God, but by his own self-interests. If we are not following God, we are easily led astray. The lamp of the body is the eye and if your "eye is good" it is allowing the Holy Spirit and light to enter and penetrate into your being and guide your life. If our eye does not allow the light of the truth to enter, the darkness within will be great. The person with a "good eye" is focused on the things that please God.

Serving two masters – Matthew 6:24

Matthew 6:24 NKJV No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

The word "serve" is more than performing a service for it literally means to be a slave of. A person may have two employers but not two owners. What are the two masters the Lord is referring to? The text says "God and mammon." "Mammon" is an Aramaic word that basically means riches, but it carries with it many other connotations. "Mammon" can be riches, lusts for the flesh and other things, or earthly things. The Aramaic māmōnās, means possessions. The principle lesson is that ones "possessions" can be used for God or as materialism which is in direct conflict with loyalty to God.

Deuteronomy 6:5 NKJV You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

According to Christ, there are only two masters. We cannot look in two directions at the same time.

Worry and Providential Care – Matthew 6:25-34

After laying down the fundamental truth in verses 19-24, Jesus applies this to our lives by instructing us to focus on God.

Matthew 6:33–34 ESV But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Jesus listed several things that we should not be worried or anxious about and at the same time He tells us to put our full trust in God's providential care.

Matthew 6:26–27 ESV Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?

Matthew 6:28–29 ESV And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you,

even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

Don't be anxious, unsettled, excited, worried or in suspense about the future.

Matthew 6:30 ESV But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Why is this a matter of faith?

Faith is a matter of trusting and relying on God. This whole section of the Sermon on the Mount addresses this matter of trust and faith. Where do we put our trust? What do we value? While Jesus is addressing our treasure and trust, He is encouraging us to put our faith in God. Although we cannot know what may happen tomorrow, we do know that God gives enough grace and mercy for today and because His love, mercy and grace are so great, we do not have to fear.

Matthew 6:33 NKJV But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

Your loving and merciful Father knows what you need.

Believer's Walk – Matthew 7:1-12; Luke 6:37-42; Luke 11:9-13; Luke 6:31

In this section, Jesus' emphasis is on our relationship with other people. He has been teaching about true righteousness and service to God. He started by emphasizing worship, then He spoke about where our treasure is.

These verses are summed up in this golden rule.

Matthew 7:12 NKJV Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.

The responsibility for doing the right thing is laid on the believer and as a result we are to do unto others what we want them to do to us. If we practice this principle, our walk will not only please God but will also resolve many of the issues addressed in this section.

Judging – Matthew 7:1-5

The text does not tell us to be gullible and believe everything but carefully examine what is said. The world is full of falsehood and doctrines of Satan.

1 John 4:1 NKJV Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Later in this chapter Jesus said, "You will know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:16)

Matthew 7:1–2 NKJV Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

What is Jesus saying? He is condemning harsh judgment and unjust criticism. To illustrate this, Jesus used the illustration of a speck and a plank. The person with the plank in their eye is attempting to remove a speck from another's eye. The person with the plank in their eye has more going wrong in their life than the one with a speck. Jesus defined the eye as the spiritual outlook of a person and the area that motivates our lives. His instruction is to help others after we have corrected our own lives. It is not wrong to help others, but before we do, we must straighten up our own lives. The underlying message is to make sure our motives and actions are righteous before God.

Your Pearls – Matthew 7:6

Matthew 7:6 NKJV Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

"Dogs" and "swine" are enemies of the Gospel. What does it mean "do not give what is holy" and "cast your pearls"? Your pearls are the treasures of the kingdom of God that you have been entrusted with. Some people are not ready to receive the sweet and precious things of God. The things that have been given to us are precious and valuable and should not be disregarded or discarded. People prove unworthy of the grace that is given when they reject it and turn away. Jesus told His disciples, *"If they do not receive you, leave town and wipe the dust off your feet."*

Matthew 7:13–14 NKJV Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Prayer – Matthew 7:7-11; Luke 11:9-13

Jesus is showing us how to live as members of the kingdom of heaven and He is demonstrating the responses that we should expect from the Father. He already taught us how to pray in the Lord's Prayer and now He is teaching us to persevere in prayer. He uses three words: ask, seek, knock.

Matthew 7:7 NKJV Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

He says: keep asking, seeking, and knocking. If you want good things

from your Father in heaven, you should do this. Your Father in heaven will give good things to those who ask Him. Jesus compared your earthly father to the Heavenly Father. Here in Matthew 7, Jesus said *"If a son asks for bread, will the earthly father give a stone?"* "If he asks for a fish, will he give a serpent?"

Matthew 7:11 NKJV If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

The Lord has been focusing on righteousness, purity, humility, wisdom and correct motives. He is encouraging believers to freely ask their Father for what they need. In Luke, the text focuses on the gift of the Spirit.

Luke 11:13 NKJV If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!

When we come to God in prayer, we do not have to fear that He will give us something harmful. God, your heavenly Father, has your best interests in mind.