

Matthew 6:16-24 – “Where Is Your Treasure?”

We’re in this great passage of Scripture known as the Sermon on the Mount. An incredible sermon Jesus gave to reveal the characteristics of the Kingdom, or more so, the character of kingdom citizens. In chapter 6 we’ve looked so far at giving and prayer, and how people were doing these things in a way to receive praise from others. This is not the way of the kingdom or to be a characteristic of kingdom citizens. As we continue on we’ll look at a couple more topics that are good, but can be used for selfish purposes.

6:16 - “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

Do not be like the hypocrites (vv. 2, 5, 16). Jesus is confronting the attitudes and intentions of these religious leaders who were conducting themselves in spiritual practices but were doing so all for personal glory and fanfare.

- A **hypocrite** is one that is a pretender, an actor. They’re playing a part, but it’s not who they really are.
- Many of these religious leaders presented themselves as those who were very religious and spiritual, if anyone was close to God it was them. But it was all an act for many of them. They were hypocrites.

They would go to great lengths to make themselves look really bad as though this fast had really taken it out of them; that they were sacrificing so much. They would make themselves look pale, or disfigured (ie. unsightly), and they would be all sad and miserable.

People loved to show their religious fervor through outward actions. Let’s face it, many people feel they’re going to heaven because they’re good people. So any chance they have to show their goodness they’re going to want to take it.

- But we’re seeing clearly through this chapter that God wants these things to simply be between you and Him.

If you’re doing it for the praise of man, then that’s your reward. And it’s a fleeting reward. Many people celebrated new Super Bowl champions last Sunday. The Chiefs basked in the accolades of others. But does anyone know who won the Super Bowl 10 years ago? 5 years ago? You see these are fleeting rewards and temporary praise. Jesus says to these hypocrites – you have your reward, and you have it in full. That’s all you’re going to get from it.

Now Jesus is going to talk about when you fast, as though it would be a followed practise, but I would say it's become somewhat of a lost discipline over this last period of history.

What is a Fast?

A fast is to abstain from something that the flesh desires. Biblically, a fast centered around food, which of course is the most common way to fast today. In fact, we call it 'breakfast' because you're breaking the fast you just were on through the night.

In the Bible we see many examples of people fasting and it was often accompanied with prayer.

- **Psalm 69:10**, *"When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, That became my reproach."* This was a fast connected to a time of confession.
- **Ezra 8:23**, *"So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer."* This was a fast of seeking God in a greater determination to hear from Him.
- **Acts 13:2**, *"As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, "Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.""* This was a fast to seek God's will for direction.

Interestingly God only commanded the Israelites to fast on one day of the year, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:27-32). But the Israelites began introducing regular fasts for various reasons.

We then see in the New Testament that fasting was a regular practice of Christian self-discipline.

Why should we Fast?

Fasting is a discipline we practise where we deny the appetites of the flesh. We know that by faith in Jesus we are born again. But that old man is a brute to put down. And when we take time to purposefully cut ourselves off from what the flesh wants, you begin to develop strength; spiritual strength that helps us in many battles we face.

- We really don't like to talk about denying ourselves of things especially when we have so much at our disposal and at the ready.
- We can fast from many different things: Food, Internet, Social Media, TV, chores...

- But the important thing is that we see this time of a fast to be a time where we are giving ourselves over more to the things of the Lord rather than to earthly pleasures. Again, fasting was often accompanied by prayer as a way of seeking in more earnest God's desires rather than our own.

What Fasting is not.

Fasting is not a way to try and manipulate God to act on our behalf. Fasting does not twist God's arm to now have to answer our prayers the way we want them answered. The motivation is always to just simply draw closer to God and know His heart. It does not improve our standing with God on a righteousness level.

Fasting is also not a command for the Christian. Don't do so because you feel obligated to do it. You're not. But I'm also not obligated to memorize Scripture but there's great benefit in doing so. And there's great benefit in fasting.

- We're reminded of our own weakness and our need for God in fasting.
- We gain spiritual strength over our bodies desire for food that will inevitably transfer over to having greater control over other more dangerous desires.
- It gives us more focused time to be pressing in with our Heavenly Father.

These are just a few of the many benefits of fasting.

Jesus says when you're carrying out a Christian act, don't be like the hypocrites. Do it from your heart and do it before God.

6:17-18 - *But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.*

Notice, Jesus says, ***when you fast***, as though it would be a normal thing for the believer. These are the same things He said regarding giving and prayer: when you do a charitable deed (6:2), when you pray (6:5).

So what Jesus instructs is when you fast, clean yourself up. Don't look like you've been in bed for a week and haven't showered or changed your clothes. Be normal about it all.

Your fast is not to impress others. If you're trying to impress others, then you're defeating the purpose of the fast – which is to deny the flesh. If you're trying to impress others, you're glorifying the flesh. That's an anti-fast.

This is to be done between you and your Heavenly Father. And when it's done that way, He will reward you. And He will reward you openly. Everything we do for Him is laying up treasures in heaven that will one day be realized.

If any believer is living their best life now, then that's a very sad reality. Because each of us as followers of Christ should be living in a way where when we join Jesus in eternity, life will be fully realized, and it will be realized as so much better than anything we experienced in this world. Especially when we have treasures stored up in heaven.

That's what the next few verses center on.

“In Matthew 6:19-24 Jesus deals with the subject of our priorities, what we treasure. He does so by addressing the heart (vv. 19-21), the soul (vv. 22-23), and the will (v. 24). Our Lord wants us to have the right treasure, the right devotion, and the right master.”¹

6:19 - “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;

This can be a very troubling verse to some because we read this and think, ‘Am I allowed to have a bank account with money in it? Am I allowed to prepare for retirement or have a little rainy-day fund?’

These are not prohibited at all. In fact the ant is commended in Proverbs for preparing food in the summer (Prov 6:6; 30:25). In 1 Timothy 5:8 the one who does not provide for his own is seen as worse than an unbeliever.

What Jesus is saying is that we are not to have a selfish preoccupation with these things. Do not lay up for **yourselves**... is key.

First of all, when we are preoccupied with the treasures of this world, we become more attached to this world. And this world is not our home! Praise God.

- **Colossians 3:1–2**, *“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”² Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”*

Secondly, the treasures of this world don't last. They are temporal. They can get stolen or fall prey to the elements of this world and be ruined.

¹ Akin, D. (2019). *Exalting Jesus in the sermon on the mount*. Holman Bible Publishers.

- Our worldly wealth is on a roller coaster ride. There's no guarantees. You can't even go to your bank and withdraw the money you're supposed to have in your account. *'Sorry, we don't keep that kind of money here'*, they say. Isn't this a bank??

Jesus has something better for us...

6:20-21 - *but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

We can't keep all that we try to accumulate here on earth, but we can be sending on treasure ahead of us. Treasures in heaven are those things that have eternal reward. Things that can't ever get stolen or ruined. They're safe and secure and to be enjoyed throughout eternity.

What are some of these treasures? We've already seen some examples right from the Sermon on the Mount:

- Suffering persecution for Jesus' sake (5:11-12)
- Loving your enemies (5:46)
- Giving generously to others (6:2-4)
- Praying with sincerity (6:5-6)
- Fasting with right motives (6:16-18)

Essentially, anything we do for the glory of God lays up treasures in heaven.

In 2 Corinthians 5:10 Paul speaks of the judgment seat that believers are going to stand before and receive the things done in this life. This is not a judgment seat to see if you're saved, rather it's a place of rewards – the Bema seat (ie. the place athletes were rewarded for how they competed in the games).

In other words, all that we did for Christ and for His work to continue through us will be rewarded. The things we did for self will be burned up (1 Cor 3:12-15).

So are you living for eternal pursuits and treasures, or are you fixated on earthly treasures. Here's the thing we need to know about this:

...where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

What you value, you will seek. What you treasure, you will follow. What is your treasure today? What do you value above all else in your life? If it's things of an earthly nature, then your heart is going to be drawn to that.

A life will be directed by what it deems most important. What is that for you?

I pray that Jesus holds that place of greatest value and worth in your life. He should. He died for you, forgave you of your sins, renewed a right relationship between you and God, and has freely given you eternal life through faith in Him. He's our greatest treasure! May that be evident by a heart that is His and living for eternity. It is a poor trade when one gives up the eternal for the temporal.

Jesus now gives a bit of an illustration of this. At first reading it sounds a little strange, almost new-agey. But let's make some sense of this.

6:22 - *“The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.*

The eye is seen as a lamp. It's through the eye by which light gets into the body. If the eye is good (ie. clear and healthy) then your whole body is going to be full of light. If what you're focussed on in this life is of good report, then it's going to add greater health to your being.

- The word **good** is translated in the KJV as 'single'. With this in mind, the idea is that if you have a single eye – a view on the things of God, then everything about you will shine.

And on the flip side...

6:23 - *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!*

A bad eye means you have double vision. You have divided loyalties. You're wanting treasures in heaven, but you're fixated on earthly wealth. If that be the case, the light is drowned out by darkness. And it's a great darkness.

You have the choice between two treasures and two visions, which ultimately comes down to your choice between two masters.

6:24 - *“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.”*

We can have lots of interests that we enjoy and follow, but we're not talking about following an interest here. We're talking about whole hearted devotion. That's what is required by these two masters. You will either be ruled by God or you will be ruled by **mammon**.

- “Mammon came from a Hebrew verb meaning “to entrust” or “to place in someone's keeping.” The noun, therefore, referred to the wealth one

entrusted to another for safekeeping. Yet as time went by, the meaning of mammon shifted from the passive sense of “that which is entrusted” to the active sense of “that in which one trusts.” When that happened, the word originally spelled with a small “m” came to be spelled with a capital “M,” as designating a god...”²

Essentially Jesus is showing us that we cannot serve both God and money. We like to think we can have a healthy compromise, but one master will always prevail. “Each demands single-minded devotion. To give anything less is to provide no true service at all” (Constable).

It’s been said, “Christ will put up with many things in the human heart, but there is one thing He will not put up with – and that’s second place.

Like Joshua who said, “*choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve*” (Joshua 24:15) and Elijah, “*How long will you falter between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him*” (1 Kings 18:21).

We all have a choice to make. Have you made that choice? Who are you serving today?

If you’re living with a greater pursuit and desire for things other than God, I can tell you that it will never satisfy or pay off.

Matthew 16:26, “*For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?*”

Choose the only One that can provide life – both the contented and peaceable life of today, but even more, the blessed eternal life with Him.

² Boice, J. M. (2001). *The Gospel of Matthew* (p. 105). Baker Books.