

BaptistWay Bible Series for Dec. 26: Christians should invest in eternal treasure_122004

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Christians should invest in eternal treasure

Matthew 6:19-34

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Having warned his disciples against becoming hypocritical spectacles by parading their piety before other people (6:1-18), Jesus turns in his “sermon” to address another critical issue that can distract or even undo those who would seek to follow him—the accumulation of and devotion to material wealth (vv. 19-34).

At the outset of the passage we are studying this week, Jesus enjoins his listeners not to stockpile treasures on earth (vv. 19-21). He calls them to be marked by generosity (vv. 22-23). Instead of being beholden to mammon and absorbed by anxiety over bare necessities, those who follow Jesus are

to serve God and seek his kingdom, believing the heavenly Father is willing and able to care for his own (vv. 24-34).

In theory, most people would agree with Job's sober assessment of life and death: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (v. 21). As one preacher quipped, "Hearses do not pull U-Hauls."



Be that as it may, it is probably true that a majority of Christians living in the Western hemisphere do not take seriously enough Jesus' command, "Do not to store up treasures for yourselves on earth" (v. 19). Despite knowing that material possessions are transitory and should be secondary, our conspicuous consumption and frantic accumulation continue.

We too frequently forfeit the opportunity to be rich toward God and too infrequently treasure what truly matters. Modern-day Christians who live in relative affluence would be unwise not to be unsettled by Jesus' sobering statement, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (v. 21).

Whereas a person who treasures treasure above all else is likely to be greedy, an individual who views money as a means and not as an end may well be generous. By speaking of the eye as the lamp of the body and by referring to one's eye as sound or unsound, healthy or unhealthy, Jesus appears to be suggesting that a person who has a sincere or single eye will be generous and full of light even as the one who has an "evil" eye will be stingy and full of darkness (vv. 22-23). Moreover, "if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness" (v. 23).

Far from being innocuous, Jesus warns that money and other material things can be sinister and can even become one's master. Those who follow

Jesus are to be cognizant that they cannot simultaneously serve God and money. A divided heart results in fractured affections, and the God who commands us to love him above and beyond all else will brook no rivals. It is as ironic as it is tragic that while "In God we trust" is printed on United States currency, we sometimes succumb to the temptation to depend upon our money and that which we can purchase with it rather than upon God (v. 24).

While it is both natural and responsible to concern oneself with basic human needs such food, drink and clothing, Jesus cautions his disciples not to be consumed with anxiety about such things lest they become enslaved to them. He asks his followers to realize that life is more than food and the body is more than clothing (v. 25).

For illustrative purposes, Jesus appeals to the heavenly Father's care for the birds of the air. Although they do not sow or reap or gather into barns, they are fed by him (v. 26). Additionally, Jesus asks his listeners to consider how beautifully and adequately the lilies or wildflowers of the field are clothed. So decked out are they that even King Solomon would pale in comparison (vv. 28-29).

By pointing to carefree birds and well-donned flowers, Jesus intends to do more than show himself an astute observer of and great admirer of nature. Primarily, he wants to impress upon his disciples that even though God cares for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, he cares much more for them. So, even as God sees fit to feed the birds and clothe the flowers, God will see all the more fit to feed and clothe them (vv. 26, 30).

Jesus would have affirmed the psalmist who wrote, "I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).

If the principle of simple trust in and reliance upon God that Jesus

promotes in this passage strikes us as somewhat naïve and overly passive, we would do well to consider the ultimate origin of the gifts and graces that we presently possess. Do we really believe God is the one from whom all blessings flow? Or have we become “practical atheists” who work and worry and worry and work within what amounts to a closed-world continuum (v. 32)?

Jesus' instruction to his followers about money and anxiety should cause his disciples today to reaffirm our belief in God's care and keeping and should prompt us to redouble our efforts to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness (v. 33). This would include, among other things, a deep gratitude for and a warm generosity with our material resources.

Whether or not we are willing to admit it, we are in fact limited in power and perception (vv. 27, 34). If for no other reason, our own human limitations provide reason enough for us to entrust ourselves anew to an all-powerful, all-knowing God who cares for birds, lilies and those of little faith.

Discussion question

- ♦ Is your trust in God reflected in your giving to others?

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