

Sermon Given by

Tony Heywood

At the Evening Service on 16th January 2011

The teaching of Jesus on... Money

Now is a particularly relevant time to look at Jesus' teaching on money. I think it was either last week or this week that people receive their credit card bills from all the Christmas spending – a bleak depressing time for many people.

I turned on the TV the other day and I didn't watch the programme for long but it was about a single mum on benefits who had spent a staggering £450 on Christmas presents for her toddler and who was now unsurprisingly crippled by debt.

Also money has been hitting the headlines as there's been that ongoing debate about whether bankers, whose banks were bailed out by the tax-payers, should receive their bonuses or not. There have been some fiery exchanges on that.

So in a way it's a particularly relevant question for us today but actually what we as believers think about money and what we do with it is of vital spiritual importance; it's a key part of our discipleship. We know this from the huge amount of teaching that Jesus gives on the topic.

Rather than dotting about though in a whole load of different passages we're going to focus tonight on Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:19-24. This is part of the sermon on the mount; that clarion call for Christians to be different from the world around us.

As God's forgiven people we're to be counter cultural because we live with God's agenda and God's priorities. And if ever there was an area where the church today needs constant vigilance it is the area of wealth and possessions.

What the world says is this: "This world is all there is so try to gain as much as you can – try to earn all that you can so that you can spend all that you can. And save all that you can so that when you stop earning you can keep spending." I.e., "Store up for yourself treasures on earth!" So that things like houses and cars and clothes and gadgets and pensions become the ultimate goals in life.

It's amazing isn't it how many newspapers and magazines seem to have rich lists. Lists not just of the richest people in the whole world but the richest people in Britain, the richest women in the world, the richest sports stars, the richest film stars and the reason they have these rich lists is because we're fascinated by wealth and the accumulation of it.

Why do the job advertisements put the financial package in bold at the bottom? Presumably it's because the employers know what matters to people – they know that for the last 100 years people in the West have defined themselves not in terms of how we relate to God but by how much we earn. The world says: "store up treasures for yourself on earth."

To protect us from this materialistic mindset – this self-centred accumulation of wealth Jesus tells us 2 main things in these verses. He urges to make the right investment v19-20 and to serve the right God v21-24.

First then, he urges us **To make the right investment**

V19 **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”**

Jesus speaks to first in the negative, what we are not to do. In contrast to worldly thinking Jesus says: **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...”** Literally he says, “Do not treasure, treasures on earth...”

Why? Because they are all fading; they don't last. Moths eat clothes, thieves steal precious items, inflation and financial crises can erode the value of the most secure savings and pension plans, rust eats through the car, fancy things fade, our bodies weaken and decay. The things of this world do not last so don't invest too much in them, don't treasure them up, don't hoard them.

I should clarify at this point what Jesus is not saying. He's not against money or wealth per se or the enjoyment of good things. Nor is Jesus against saving wisely. What's he's speaking against is the love of money, the selfish hoarding of the materialist or the miser. And if what we supremely value and treasure are the things of this world then we're in danger because the things of this world are fading. Thieves, rust and moths will get to work.

One of the great benefits of working with Mark Ashton at St Andrew the Great in Cambridge for 3 years was learning from his very unmaterialistic mindset. He used to come out with some quite shocking but very helpful things now and again.

So one time in my first year on the staff, I and the other parish assistant had failed to lock the church building one night. Some homeless guys had got in and they made a real mess of the place and they'd put little post-it stickers on some pricey bits of sound and musical equipment saying things like: “We could have nicked this!”

We felt very bad about this and went to apologise to Mark – we were a bit worried that he'd give us a rocket but to our amazement he was very cheery and said: “Don't worry at all; it's very good for wealthy Christians to be burgled as we're so attached to our possessions.”

Another time we had a notice in the service sheet saying that thieves had been active. Nothing too unusual about that but then Mark explained that it was there primarily for the sake of the thieves because they needed to repent and believe.

Sounds a bit loopy and of course it can be very distressing to be the victim of theft or burglary but traumatic as it may be particularly if you bump into the burglar, it is still nonetheless an opportunity to rejoice that our lives are about so much more than our possessions, which will all go at some point anyway.

So the negative, Jesus says: **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...”** He says this because he wants us to make a wiser investment.

Money-minded folk are always looking for that ideal investment; something that will give them a great return at minimal risk. Investments like that are hard to come by especially in this day and age but Jesus points to the perfect investment.

Here’s the positive – v20: **“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”**

Here’s the right investment, treasures in heaven are eternally secure. Heaven should be our ultimate goal in life. Of course we have to spend a great deal of our time engaged in the essential business of the world – earning a living, buying and preparing food and much else besides but our true goal, our true focus is on heaven.

For the person trusting in Jesus, heaven is guaranteed and we’re to live now in the light of that certain future – that’s what it means to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

To be more practical – what are the things that last into eternity? People; all we can take with us is ourselves. That means that our personal holiness must be at the top of our priorities. We can’t take our most prized possessions – that diamond ring, that beautiful painting, that fancy sports car but our faith, hope and love will remain.

This should impact on our attitude towards work. Of course Christians should work hard and earn the wages that they are paid but some people do far more than is necessary and pay the price spiritually. It may be that we’re more likely to be promoted if we are the last to leave the office every evening but there are far more important things than promotion. If the cost of the longer hours is that we have no time left to read the Bible and pray, or to meet with other believers, or to be a godly spouse and parent then promotion cannot be worth it. If we don’t have as much income. So what? In the light of eternity it doesn’t matter whether we drive a Mercedes or a Metro or whether we go on holiday to Brighton or Bermuda.

Our personal holiness is one priority – in a similar way we should invest in the spiritual welfare of others. So maybe there’s a younger Christian who you could meet up to read the Bible with or two others you could form a prayer triplet with. Maybe leading at trekkers is something for you to think about or visiting that elderly Christian who’s on their own now.

Prayer is another great way to invest in heaven – so too are acts of Christian love and kindness. So too is evangelism – is there someone you could invite to Christianity Explored or is there someone you could offer to babysit for so that they could come? Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.

At our TNG w/e away before Christmas, Greg Cushing our speaker had played the day before in the Rugby Varsity Match before a crowd of about 40,000 people at Twickenham. Greg loves his rugby, he was thrilled to play and he was gutted to lose. He told us though how for many of his team mates the varsity match was the biggest day of their lives. It was very moving to hear him speak of how he

was more excited, more pumped was the expression he used by the opportunities he had and took to tell some of his team mates about Jesus. Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, says Jesus.

And what about our money? Does the way we spend it indicate that we are more concerned with storing up treasures on earth or in heaven?

What gets more – my holiday budget or my giving budget? Do I spend more on the family pet; all that food and treats, the kennel fees, the vet's fees or on overseas mission.

It's always worth asking those sort of tough questions and thinking about what sacrifices we could make so that we can give more.

Giving to gospel causes is one of the most exciting investments to make. In Luke 16:9 Jesus says: **"Use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings."**

So as we give as part of the All Saints Gift Day and it's not too late for that by the way, it's exciting to think that we're making friends for heaven. It's not the main motivation for giving – we give above all because Christ gave himself for us but it's exciting to think that there may be people who greet us in heaven who through our giving have come to hear about and trust in Jesus for themselves.

A Chinese man who says, "Thank you so much for that money you gave for Bibles to be printed in my language – I was given a Bible in 2011 and as I read it I came to see that Jesus is Lord and so I bowed the knee before him and received Him as my Saviour."

A Saudi Arabian woman who thanks us for our partnership with Arab World Ministries because it was through the Mariifa website that she came to find out the truth about Jesus Christ.

Giving to support gospel work is one of the most exciting things we can do. The builder John Laing is great example to us. At a young age he was earning a good salary in the family construction business. He bought a modest house on an estate, in which he lived for the rest of his life. He worked out that he could provide for his family on only a third of his income. He saved half of what remained and gave the rest away to gospel causes. After a while the income from his savings provided enough to live on so he gave all that he earned away. When he died in 1979, his personal fortune was a just a few hundred pounds. To this day, the money that he gave is being used to fund significant Christian ministry. Make the right investment, says Jesus **"store up for yourselves treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."**

Make the right investment and then inextricably linked – indeed it's the key foundation: **Serve the right God**

For as Jesus says in v24: **"No-one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."**

How do we know whether we serve God or Money? Jesus tells us in v21-23. v21: **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**”

I.e. “show me how a person uses their time and money” says Jesus “and I’ll tell you whether they live for me or for this world.” What we invest in – what we treasure reveals what or who we’re ultimately committed to. If we want to have a spiritual check up we should, amongst other things of course, take a close look at our bank statements and our diaries. They will reveal a lot about what’s really important to us.

In v21 it’s the heart, in v22-23 it’s our eye. The eye is a picture for our vision in life. V22b **“If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light...”**

In other words if we’re focused on the Lord Jesus and heaven, we’ll have the light of that perspective on how we use our time and resources. We’ll have clear judgement; we’ll see what ultimately matters, what lasts and what doesn’t and invest accordingly.

It’s very fitting that we’re sharing the Lord’s Supper tonight because the best way to keep serving God not Money is by focussing on the Lord Jesus. You see we don’t store up for ourselves treasures in heaven to somehow earn our way into heaven – that saving work was done 2000 years ago on a hill outside Jerusalem. We treasure Christ, we love him and live for him and long to make him known because he first treasured us. He treasured us so much that he laid down his life for us. A person can’t treasure him and honour him with their use of money until they first grasp how much he has treasured them.

Audio versions of the sermons can be freely downloaded from the All Saints Little Shelford website, <http://www.allsaintslittleshelford.org>. These are available in two formats, mp3 and wma.

(All scripture quoted is from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise stated.)