

September 1/2, 2007

Jesus' Motive for Giving

Matthew 6:19-24

Pastor Bryan Clark

This morning we conclude our three week discussion about the importance of managing or stewarding our time, our talents, and this morning we're talking about our treasures. Now if you're visiting with us this morning, we don't talk about money all the time. You just have really good timing. We talk about it once in August and a couple of times in January. But please understand when I say that I'm not apologizing. I'm just explaining. We don't apologize for talking about money. We believe it's very important to God how we steward or manage what we've been given. And if it's important to God, it needs to be important to us.

The reality is there is probably no area of our lives where we have a greater potential to just make a mess of our lives than in this area of our finances. And to put it a little bit stronger, two weeks ago we talked about management of time, last week more about talents but the reality is if we do not get control of this area of our lives according to God's principles, the discussions of the last two weeks are really irrelevant because if you are out of control in the area of your finances, you will never manage your time or your talents well for God's purposes. So, it is very important.

I think one of the reasons that we often struggle in this whole area of giving, the reason oftentimes, God's piece of the pie is so small—if not non-existent—is because we have it in our heads, *That which I give to God, I lose. And that which I keep for myself, I ultimately keep.* But like so many areas of our Christian faith, it's just the opposite. It goes against what we would naturally think. The reality is what I choose to keep for myself I will, at the end of the day, lose. That which I choose to give to God is that which I will keep forever.

If you're new to Lincoln Berean in the last several months you may not be aware of the fact that the last three and a half years have really been a remarkable experience for us in terms of generosity and giving. Many, many thousands of people committed to building God's Kingdom and allowing us to move ahead as a church through very generous giving. As a matter of fact, those of us on the Board and the Stewardship Team and the Business Team have often in the last three and half years used the term miraculous in terms of what God has done.

For those of you who have given so faithfully and so generously, I trust that what we talk about this morning will be a wonderful encouragement to you. If you're visiting this morning, you need to understand it's likely you're sitting next to the one of the most generous people in our community. And that's something we celebrate together.

If you have a Bible, turn with me to Matthew chapter 6. Matthew chapter 6 is part of what we call The Sermon on the Mount. And in this part of The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is talking about living out a righteous life. It's fairly obvious when you look at the first couple of verses of chapter 6 that he's talking about things like prayer and things like fasting and what we do with our money, our giving. And that's the subject we pick up this morning starting in verse 19.

“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 neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.”

(Matthew 6:19-20; *NASB)

Jesus opens this discussion with a ‘do not’ followed by a ‘do’. So, let’s first look at his ‘do not’ statement. **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.”** The word ‘store up’ means to stockpile or actually can be translated ‘treasure’. It’s a little bit of a play on words. “Do not treasure treasures on earth.” Why? Because no matter what you do at the end of the day, you cannot keep it. Why spend your life storing up or stockpiling something that you just simply cannot keep.

In the first century—we’ve talked about this before—if you accumulated some degree of wealth, one of the big challenges was how do you keep it? How do you protect it? They didn’t have banks and safes like we think of them today. So one of the real challenges is how do you keep this? Oftentimes people would put their wealth into expensive garments and they would literally wear their wealth. They would wear their IRA, because it was the only way they could prevent someone from stealing it. So, that was fairly common. They might put it into some sort of coinage or precious metal and then just try to hide it.

And that’s what Jesus is talking about. **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy.”** The word ‘rust’ there could be translated ‘rodent’ or ‘rat’. It may also be talking about the garments. The idea is that even if you put your money into expensive garments, what are going to do while you sleep? How do you know there isn’t going to be a rat or a moth or something that comes and eats away your retirement account and you get up in the morning and there’s nothing there? How do you prevent that? How do you stop that if you have some level of coinage, how do you make sure it doesn’t rust and lose its value?

Or, **“where thieves break in and steal.”** The Greek ‘break in’ is literally ‘dig through’. In the ancient world these houses were typically made of a mud or clay. You didn’t break in. You dug through. But the idea is getting into the house and stealing it. So, people that accumulated wealth, lived with that anxiety every single day, *How do I keep this?*

Now we understand in our world today, it’s different, but in some ways it’s very much the same. If we accumulate wealth, we can put it in the bank. We can put in the stock market. We can put it into real estate. We can take high risk or low risk. There are options for what we can do to hold on to our wealth. But, the reality is at the end of the day, everyone loses it. There is absolutely nothing you can do with your wealth. To hold onto it, you eventually lose it. Now, you can spend it. You can buy all kinds of stuff. And there’s nothing wrong with stuff, as long as we keep our perspective that everything we buy is eventually going to become junk.

The stage this morning is littered with junk that at one time was brand new. And I’m guessing people saved for a long period of time in order to afford some of this stuff that today we would categorize as junk.

At the end of our lives, looking back certainly we want to have more to our lives than having simply accumulated lots of junk. What else can we do? We can save it. We can stock pile it. And we can pass it on to our kids. Well, I have a couple of problems with that. One problem is that the odds would be eight out of ten of those kids are going to waste it. Beyond that, eight out of ten of your kids are going to be harmed by that. And I would raise the question: Why would you do that to you children? Why would you play those odds? Everybody says that won’t happen with my kids. Why would you play those odds? That seems to be a bit high risk to me.

But more than that, when I think about what I want for my girls in this area of stewardship, I want them to be wise stewards. I want them to pour what they have into God’s purposes which will last

forever. And the best way to teach them that is to model that. I want to be a model for them of generosity. When I pass on to them huge chunks of money, what I've modeled for them is stockpiling. And that's really not a biblical value. And that's really not what I want to teach my girls. I'd rather have them see me being generous with what God has given me for God's purposes.

So, that's probably not a great option, but whatever you choose to do with what God has given you, at the end of the day, you lose it.

If I'm giving my money to a Christian organization to further God's Kingdom, I don't want them putting that money in an account somewhere just to have it sit there for the next twenty years. If I find that out, I'm going to give it to somewhere else. I didn't give that money so it could be stockpiled in an account. I gave that money so it could further God's Kingdom. I want it out into play. I want it making a difference. Why would God's view be any different than that?

In thinking about stockpiling money, I want to ask you a question: (I'm not talking about retirement accounts and savings accounts—things that are just prudent—I'm talking about stockpiling, above and beyond that.) Is there anybody here this morning who honestly thinks the reason God has blessed you financially is so you can stockpile it rather than furthering His Kingdom?

So, Jesus is saying, "Hey, don't do that. Don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, because at the end of the day, you can't keep it. Whatever you choose to keep, just know at the end of the day, that's what you lose."

What's the alternative, verse 20:

"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;" (v. 20)

Now, when you think about it, that's a remarkable statement. What Jesus is saying is you treasure treasures in heaven. Why? Because they can never be lost. They can never be stolen. They can never be devalued. If over the last three and a half years, you have sacrificed and given generously, isn't it a wonderful thing to know that no matter what happens, no matter what happens with the economy, no matter what happens to you, you have laid up for yourselves, treasures in heaven which can never be lost.

Now, there are a couple of interesting phrases in this verse we need to talk about. Several years ago I was reading a book which was a collection of sermons on stewardship written by a pastor by the name of Earl Pierce. It was somewhere back in the 1930's and '40's, and these were all compiled in 1947. In one of his messages, probably the one that struck me the most, he was talking about Jesus' motive for giving. In other words, what does Jesus say ought to be your motive for giving. And he identified it as self-interest. Not selfishness—selfishness is the enemy of self-interest, but self-interest. And when I read that I thought, *That's not right!*

So, I began to think about it, and he made the statement that every single time Jesus talked about money His motive that He gives is always the same, self-interest. So, I went through the Gospels and identified every single time, and he was exactly right. Which is exactly what it says here, **"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."**

Now, some of you may be pushing back in your head and saying, "You know, it needs to be more than that. It needs to be because we love Jesus. It needs to be because it's an act of worship." And

all of that is true. There are passages that talk about that. But you cannot dismiss the fact that every time Jesus talked about giving, He gave one motive, **“Do this for yourself.”**

But, when you stop and think about it, that’s not all that unusual, God wants His best for us. I seek God’s plan because that’s in my best self interest. I seek to be obedient to God because I know that’s in my own best interest. God just wants the best for us. And so, what He is saying is, “Don’t take what I’ve given to you and waste it so that at the end of the day you have nothing. It’s in your best interest to store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

Well, that raises the second question: What does He mean by treasures in heaven? I don’t think it translates into cash in heaven. You’re not going to have a bag of cash waiting for you when you get there. So what does it mean? I’m going to give you as clear of an answer on this one as I gave you on rewards two weeks ago—I just don’t know.

It’s very similar to the idea of rewards. Clearly, it’s something beyond our salvation. Clearly, it’s something that matters in the life to come. Clearly He’s saying that you need to do something in this life and it will benefit in the life to come, but exactly what that means I do not know.

But, again, like the discussion of rewards, we don’t have to be able to explain it and fully understand it to still capture the principle. And the principle is what we do as stewards in this life does affect our experience for eternity. Exactly what that means, I don’t think anyone quite knows.

So, Jesus says, “Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” Whatever that means, He’s very clear, those treasures can’t be lost. They can’t be stolen. They can’t be taken away. They are eternally secure. Verse 21:

“for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (v. 21)

This is the part of Jesus’ sermon that most people really don’t like. Actually, I hear this verse quoted often, but it’s usually quoted backwards. People say, “Where your heart is, that’s where your treasure is.” That’s not what He said. He said, “Where your treasure is, that’s where your heart is.” Jesus understands this is such a powerful part of our lives that wherever we choose to put our treasures, that’s where our heart’s going to be. Another way of saying this is if Jesus doesn’t have your treasures, Jesus doesn’t have your heart.

I think that’s one of the reasons why people tend to squirm when we talk about money. Money has a way of exposing us. It’s very easy to convince ourselves that we are really good Christians. And that we’re walking the walk. And we’re being good people. And we sing these songs that Jesus is all we need. We surrender everything to Him. And we’ve convinced ourselves that that’s the case. Until Jesus says, “Now wait a minute. Wait a minute! I want to check the ledger of your checkbook, because if I don’t have your treasures, don’t kid yourself, I don’t have your heart.”

And at that moment we’re busted! At that moment, we’re exposed. There is a glimpse into our hearts that we really don’t like. Now, it’s important to recognize this isn’t my opinion. This is what Jesus said. “Where your treasure is, that’s where your heart is.”

I think Jesus anticipates that people are going to say, “You know what, I don’t really think that’s true. I mean, I look at all the other things that I do and the ways that I serve God, and I just don’t think the money thing is all that big a deal.” So, He goes right on to that discussion in verse 22.

“The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!” (vs. 22-23)

It's a little bit hard to understand that section. It's a little confusing in the way that it's worded. But in the first century, the people believed that the eye was like a window. It was a lamp. And that's the window through which the light came. And if your eye was good, then you had adequate light and the rest of your body was able to function. In other words, live out your life. But, if the eye is bad, then you aren't getting light, and you had to function in the dark. And of course, especially in the ancient world, that was much more difficult.

Maybe in our world today, to try and clarify it, let's think in terms of windshield—like the windshield on a car. And what he is saying is if the windshield is clear and you can see out of it, then the rest of your body can function normally and you can drive safely. But, if the window is unclear—let's imagine it's January and the windshield is covered with a layer of ice. And you can't see out of it. You know that, and so you don't go speeding down the highway. You're well aware of the fact you can't see. Many of us have had those moments where the defrost is going full speed, and you've chunked out a little bit of a hole to see through, and you're just kind of creeping down the road. But you know that, and so you know, *I shouldn't be going fast. I need to be very careful. This is very dangerous.* So, what He's saying is if you know that, at least you respond accordingly.

The concern is the person who thinks the windshield is clear, but it's actually covered with ice. And they can't see anything. That person has become self-deceived. That person thinks everything is fine, is going to go full speed ahead, and is going to have a major crash. That's what He's saying.

“If you think your eye is clear but it's actually dark, how great is the darkness?” He's basically talking about people who have convinced themselves, *Even though God doesn't have my money, everything's okay, because God has my heart. And I help in Sunday School. And I do this. And I do that. And I 'm a really good person. At the end of the day, I think I'm a really good Christian even though God doesn't have my treasure.* And what's He's saying is if you have convinced yourself everything's okay when in reality your windshield is covered with ice, you have the biggest problem of all. You're going to get to the end of your days and realize that you have lost it all.

Then He summarizes in verse 24:

“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” (v. 24)

God and 'mammon' is the Greek word. It means your money and your stuff. There's nothing wrong with stuff. We all have stuff. But there is a difference between *having* stuff and *servicing* stuff. And what Jesus is saying is, “At the end of the day, you can't have it both ways. Either at the end of your life you're going to have lived for those things that last forever—the things of God. Or, you're going to have lived for the things of this earth. But you're going to have to make a choice. It's one or the other. You can't serve both.”

I think one of the reasons we spend so much time being frustrated as Christians is because we're trying to live with one foot in both worlds. And Jesus is saying, “It just doesn't work that way. Nothing wrong with money, nothing wrong with having lots of money, nothing wrong with stuff. As long as at the end of the day the passion of your heart is to serve God and build His Kingdom and not to pour yourself into the things of this world.”

John says something very similar in First John chapter 2. He says, “You can't love God and the world. You can't have two lovers. You're going to have to make up your mind which it's going to be.”

I think we understand that concept. Those of us who are married certainly do. If I were to come home today and say to Patti, “Honey, I want you to know I really love you, and I still love you. And the last 26 years have been a wonderful ride, but I’ve decided I’d like to have two lovers.” Once I regained consciousness, I’d be fully aware, *That’s a bad plan*. If Patti won’t tolerate that, what makes us think God would?

So, that’s what Jesus is saying. “You can’t have two masters. You’re going to have to decide. At the end of the day, are you going to steward your time, your talents, your treasures for Me or for this world?”

Now as we begin to wrap this up this morning, I just want to get into a couple of practical things to think through. Whenever we talk about giving to God, one question is always, “Well, what do you mean by that? Is that like a dollar a week? Is it five dollars a week? What do you mean?” You hear people talk about a tithe and the word tithe means ten percent. They get that from the Old Covenant where ten percent was considered to be a minimal standard.

There are those people who look at the Old Testament and see that that money was used to feed the poor and other things and equate that with their taxes. So, there are people that say, “Well, ten percent, but I include my taxes in that.” Well you need to understand something. In the Old Testament, if you’re going to do that, it wasn’t ten percent, it was thirty-three percent. There were three tithes plus one every three years. So, if you’re going to go down that path, it’s thirty-three percent. So you may want to rethink that a little bit.

The question is always: Does the tithe apply in the New Covenant, most of the New Testament? Well, there doesn’t seem to be clear teaching that the tithe automatically rolls over into the New Covenant. What we are told is to give as God has given to you. And all of us would agree that what we have received in the New Covenant is far superior to what they had in the Old Covenant. So, certainly we haven’t received less. And certainly we have received more.

So, you can make a strong case that a tithe would be a minimal standard. It would be a starting place. Some people see tithe as kind of the finish line but that’s really not correct. Tithe would just be a good place to start and then where God leads you from there is between you and God. So, if you want some sort of a percentage to just get your hands around this, I think that’s a good place to start.

Now as soon as I say that there are people who automatically kind of go into a panic. You’re running your budget through your head and you’re saying, “Impossible!” Well, there are a couple things with that. It is impossible for some of you because you have treasured the treasures of earth and you’re extended beyond your means. You bought more house than you can afford, more cars than you can afford. You’ve got credit card bills, and you’ve accumulated all of this stuff, and maybe for you right now, it is impossible. The question is, what are you willing to do about that?

Maybe you need to downsize. Maybe you need to bring your life back into order so you can live according to God’s values. You say, “Well, I love our house! And I love my car!” So, I’m going to ask the question: Do you love them more than Jesus? Jesus doesn’t have a cash flow problem. He doesn’t need your money. What He wants is your heart. But He wants us to understand, “Where your treasure is, that is where your heart is.”

Some of you feel like you’re so overwhelmed, you’ve made such a mess, you don’t even know where to turn. We can help with that. Right now we have financial coaches that are waiting to

come alongside you to help you work out your budget, to get you on a plan. They'll walk with you for six months or a year to get you back on your feet so you can order your finances according to God's principles. If you're interested in that, talk to someone at the Stewardship booth which is right across the hall from the Coffee House. We're here to help any way that we can help you get your life back in order.

One other thing to point out with this message, there's always the danger of using a message like this to judge other people. You see somebody that has a nicer house than yours and you say, "Oh, they obviously treasure the things of earth." Or somebody that drives a nicer car than you, "Oh, they're obviously living for the things of this earth." How do you know that? How do you know that that person that has a very nice house doesn't give fifty percent of his or her income to God's purposes? You don't know that. You don't know how generous that person is.

You know, if we're going to go down that line of thinking, we all have way more stuff than the majority of people on the earth today. We all have way more stuff than the rest of the world. So, there's just no way to do that in a way that there's anything more than just speculating and judging other people.

God's not impressed with poverty. You know, I have 1987 Toyota that I drive. That's not a spiritual thing. I'm not trying to make some sort of a statement with that. My goal is to keep it long enough that I can go down to Culver's on Friday night and open the hood and stand by it! And, I think I'm really close! It's nothing more than the fact that I personally choose not to put my money into a vehicle, because I want to spend it on some other stuff. There's nothing spiritual about that. It doesn't make me a better steward than anyone else. You just have to be careful that you aren't judging other people about things you know nothing about.

This is really for you. This is really for me. For each of us to say, "Okay, I know how much I make. I know what God has given us. I know what our budget is. I know how we spend our money." Knowing that, we need to ask ourselves: Are we really treasuring the things of heaven? And is that evident in what we do with our money? Remembering that that which you keep, you lose. That which you choose to give to God, you keep forever. So, Jesus would say, "It is in your own self-interest to consider stewarding your time, your talents, your treasures for God's eternal purposes."

Our Father, we are thankful that You are such a faithful God. You have given us so much. Lord, we would all acknowledge it's really easy to get caught up in the value system of this world, to accumulate more stuff, to accumulate more bank accounts. Lord, You've warned us that at the end of the day, that amounts to nothing. Lord, it is in our best interest to invest that which You've given to us into that which will last forever. To store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, knowing that where our treasure is, is an indication of where our heart is. Lord, I pray this morning especially for those for whom the windshield is covered with ice, and they don't think it is. Lord, they've convinced themselves that they can be a really good Christian, that You have their heart, yet You have no access to their treasures. Lord, I pray that your Spirit would open up their eyes this morning, and they would see the truth. Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.