

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Matthew 6:19-34

Concerning Treasures

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The Eye

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

Serving Two Masters

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Do Not Worry

²⁵ "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ 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? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single hour to your span of life? ²⁸ And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' ³² For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.

A man tells the story about his grandson, Isaiah. Isaiah was three years old; he had a problem wandering off and hiding. One day my daughter Maeghan and my wife Becky were shopping at a local mall and of course, he slipped off. All of a sudden, they realized he was missing. They panicked, running through the whole store calling his name. But he never answered. The sense of loss was overwhelming. How could he have gotten away that easily? Where could he have gone? Or the worse fear of every parent, .. has someone taken him?

There in a single moment, Maeghan and Becky went from a pleasant shopping trip to total devastation. In the blink of an eye, they had lost the most precious thing in their lives.

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever lost sight of one of your children? It has to be one of the worst feelings in the world.

Did you know that this is the way Our Father feels about us? He knows we have a tendency to slip away and hide from him. And we know that instead of hiding, we should be seeking Him. We are his children, and he cannot forget nor forsake us. He waits and encourages us to seek and find Him, as He seeks us.

That day, Maeghan and Becky eventually found Isaiah. He was hiding beneath a rack of clothes. I can't express how much their hearts leaped with joy. That is how much God cares for us. Questions we might ask ourselves is do our hearts leap with joy when we find God? Do we care enough to take the time to seek God? And when we find God, are we open to God's will for our lives?

Indeed today, as we approach the scripture reading before us from the perspective of the stewardship to the church, and ultimately to God, of our time, talents and resources, we are going to consider what, or whom, we are seeking and accepting to guide our hearts and the principles by which we live. The texts read to us are excerpts from the Sermon on the Mount. What we call the Sermon on the Mount actually begins with Matthew 5. The "sermon" a series of teachings Jesus shared with a multitude of people who, likely after hearing about him, gathered to see him and hear him teach. The stage from which he spoke was on a hillside near Capernaum.

In short, my Life Application Bible says this about the basics of Jesus' teachings at this event, which likely took place over several days: "Jesus proclaimed his attitude toward the law. Position, authority, and money are not important in his kingdom – what matters is faithful obedience from the heart." Faithful obedience, how do we know what that entails if we do not know the subject to whom we want to give our allegiance?

Maybe the first thing we need to ask ourselves is, to whom, or even, what do we want to commit our lives to, so as to direct our living? The particular portions of these words of wisdom in Jesus' teachings invites us to consider first: Is it treasures for ourselves, the desire for stuff that we seek? If it is, Jesus tells us, it will drive and control the choices we make and the way we live.

Verses 19-21, let me be clear, are not instructions to give as much money as you can to the church so that you can earn your way into God's favor and heaven. The lesson Jesus wants us to hear is that God is our treasure, and we should be seeking God; and our intention should be that in seeking God, it will be our desire to be obedient to the fulfillment of God's purposes in all we do, not merely what we do with our money.

In verses 22-23, Jesus is talking about spiritual vision. He calls our attention to think consider what we are allowing ourselves to take into our souls as nourishment for our souls; and how that then influences the choices and directions for our lives. The spiritual direction of our lives can end up being self-serving if we feed our hearts and souls with temporary and foolish secular promises and pleasures we see in life, rather than the spiritual everlasting promises of God and God's will. We make the choice every day in what we will feed our hearts and souls. Seeking God ensures that we will be fed with the right nutrients to have a healthy spirit.

It is a choice. I know you hear me say that often, but it is the truth. God created us with the opportunity to make choices, mainly with the hope that we would choose to have a relationship, a genuine personal relationship and not a puppet-led relationship, with Him, a relationship that involves choices that lead to endeavoring to do God's will.

Jesus reminds us then, in verse 24, that we cannot have two masters over our lives. One master will always have more of our attention and devotion. We must choose. Jesus essentially asks us in these verses; what or who will it be, God or money that owns your life? We live in a very materialistic society where stuff that we see stirs our desires and wants, and in the end controls us to direct our energy in efforts for attaining stuff. Our efforts may lead to sin as we ignore matters of serving the needs of others for our own selfish desires. The stuff we attain through our efforts, in the end, really only lead to empty souls.

Choosing to seek God and make God the master of our souls outweighs the temporary good feeling in possessing stuff. Our efforts spurred by our faithfulness to God are much more

fulfilling to our souls. They give our living a worthwhile purpose. Our obedience to God brings joy to our hearts because we know we are fulfilling God's purposes and pleasing God, the Almighty Creator of all.

Then we get to verses 24-34 and we find Jesus teaching about what might be our biggest obstacle to seeking and finding God. It may be the most powerful fear that redirects our attention to things other than that of God. Worry, worry by consuming our thoughts, plays with our emotions, hinders our health and disrupts our ability to make wise choices, slows down our productivity and even affects the way we treat others, if we allow it to be our main focus.

There is no denying that worry is not easily ignored or redirected. It is simple to tell someone not to worry...take all your worries to Jesus, we may say. But it is another thing to truly surrender our worries and maintain a worriless state of mind. This may sound a little crazy, but I believe, some people hold onto their worry for security. They want to hold on to control of their lives, in this case, worry, so that they don't need to step out into the unknown, perhaps taking a risk that may be uncomfortable, but that will also resolve what is worrying them.

Something I found interesting in my study preparation for this message is one commentator's differentiation between the meaning of worry and genuine concern. This person suggests that worry immobilizes a person, which I agree happens a lot; and concern, on the other hand, moves one to action. When one is concerned about something, they are looking for answers, and directing their actions towards doing something.

Jesus does say that when we worry, the best thing to do is to seek first the kingdom of God. Instead of rolling over and over again in our minds the things that lead us to worry, Jesus says to turn to God for help, to fill our thoughts with God's desires, to take on his character for the pattern of our lives, and to serve and obey God in everything.

This requires that we decide, "what is really important to us? Our worries, which are usually wrapped around people, relationships, objects, goals and other desires that we embrace as our priorities. But isn't God the One who is to be the number one, over anyone or anything else, our priority? Any of these other things can easily and quickly become most important to us if we don't actively choose to give God first place in EVERY area of our lives.

Jesus says in verse 34, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Once again, as I turned to the notes in my interpreter's bible, I found this helpful note on this verse: "Planning for tomorrow is time well spent; worrying about tomorrow is time wasted. Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference. Careful planning is thinking ahead about goals, steps, and schedules, and trusting in God's guidance. When done well, planning can help alleviate worry. Worriers, by contrast, are consumed by fear and worry and find it difficult to trust God. They let their plans interfere with their relationship with God."

Worry can affect many areas of our lives, including that of the stewardship of our time, talents and resources. When we put worry, about our own needs and wants, or on whether the church's ideas are not our own or seem too grandiose, ahead of God and God's will, we may be trusting ourselves more than God, and may hold back on what we are capable of doing, and what we may be called by God to do. We may close the door on the possibilities, which we talked about last Sunday, that God may present to us individually and corporately. Putting God first frees us to see God's spiritual vision within us, that awakens our whole being, then, to fulfill all that glorifies Him, strengthens our own faith, and leads others to know Him and be a part of God's kingdom.

October 15, 2023 - "What If We Seek God First?"

Tree-skiing may sound like a death wish, but some skiers love the risk of skiing virgin powder through a stand of aspen or spruce. The key, of course, is not hitting the trees. And that can be tricky.

Even more so than in deep snow or moguls, what you focus your eyes on becomes critical in the woods. Look at the spaces between the trees – the exits where you hope to be traveling.

Or, in the words of a past extreme skiing world champion Kim Reichelm: “Don’t stare at what you don’t want to hit.”

As you consider your stewardship commitments of time, talent and resources this year, seek God first, and don’t get lost in the fear and worries of other, “what ifs.” Seek God, God’s call, God’s wisdom, above all else. Amen.