

SERMON ON THE MOUNT CH 6 V19-34

When Western Christians go overseas to Africa, they notice that many Christians there embrace both Christianity and some of the ancient cultural gods. Western Christians struggle to understand how this can be. For the African church this is a blind spot

The thing about blind spots is that we struggle to see our own blind spots. If we could see a blind spot it would not be a blind spot. Christians that come to the west from the rest of the world are often struck by our consumer society, - by our love of things, of stuff. Our idol is our love and pursuit of stuff. This is the Western churches blind spot.

When we read this passage it is important to realize that most people who were listening to this sermon were poor. They were peasant farmers and they lived day by day in very poor conditions. There was no security day to day. Many of those listening would have led a subsistence lifestyle, where each day was a struggle to survive. Later on when this was in written form, and being read to the early church in the cities, life was also incredibly tough. Cities were over crowded with people and animals

So why do we want treasure on earth

- Security - we feel safe with stuff
- Personal value - we feel good about ourselves if we have nice stuff
- Power - gives us a sense of control over our lives
- Independence - we can be our own God, we are not dependent
- Pleasure - we can indulge ourselves

The challenge of these verses is they apply to us all. If we don't have much, we long to get more and worry about it. If we do have lots, we worry about how to keep and protect it. Challenge is where our heart is. So none of us have an easy out with these verses.

V9-20. View life through the lens of eternity. Clothes were the big item in ancient world; if you had money and wanted to show you had status, you did it through clothes. But clothes are susceptible to moths. Rust was not just iron rust but decay in crops that you had stored in barns. Thieves in this time could dig a hole in wall of house, which was made of mud to steal your stuff.

The stuff that we put so much effort into getting does not last. Some of you have had the experience of cleaning out a parents house as they down size. A life time of stuff gets whittled down to what you can fit in one small room at a rest home. The contrast is drawn with what we store in heaven. It doesn't say what that is but Jews understood what treasure in heaven meant. Two things.

1. Acts of kindness and generosity. Paul talks of our works being like gold and silver in the life to come.

in 1 Cor 3:12-15. He says that these things will not be burnt up at judgement.

2. A persons character. We can't take anything with us when we die, except ourselves, the person that we are. That is why the Bible gives great emphasis on our character – the kind of person we really are.

V21-23 What you give the most attention to is what you value the most i.e. it is your god. The eye was considered to let light into the heart. So what you looked at as it were is what you are putting into your heart. It is not literal concept. The evil eye focuses on stuff that you want. You look with envy at what others have, or what is in the catalogue or in the add, and you desire it. Your eye focuses on it and your heart desires it. What are you giving the most attention to in your life? This tells you what your treasure is. What do you value the most.

V24. Either God or stuff will have priority and be your master. This is a black or white proposition. One of these will be the most important. One of them will have priority over the other. It's important we understand the picture here. In ancient times as a slave you could only have one master. Today we might have two jobs, so in a sense can have two bosses. And even then outside of work hours you are free to do what you want. But in ancient times, a slave was the total possession of one master. They had complete control over you in all things.

The language of love or hate can seem extreme. Jesus is using exaggeration here. It is not using hate and love in an emotional sense. Jesus is communicating the binary choice here. It is one or the other. However this extreme language has led thought to some extreme sorts of view.

- a. We are to deny ourselves any pleasure from material things. Asceticism.
- b. Making money is bad. Yet Jesus commends wise use of resources
- c. Having money is bad. Money itself if not the issue but the love of money.
- d. We are not to plan for the future. However there is lots of teaching commending forward planning.

But we can't escape the radical demands of Jesus words. It require some serious self reflection, given that many see this as the blind spot of Christians who live in the west. Jesus sets up Mammon as a rival god to himself. Mammon is the No 1 spiritual power of our age that seduces us into worshipping him.

V 25-27 It is hard not to worry about food if we don't have enough money. For many today that is a reality. But this was said and written to people who lived in that reality. Jesus says to the poorest. "Focus first on doing my will and putting me first, and I will provide for you."



The argument Jesus is making is . I made the birds and I provide for them. And I made you far superior to the birds and surely I will look after you too. Of course you are more valuable than the birds is the answer to the rhetorical question.

Can your worries and a single moment to you life. Well actually they do the opposite. Worry doctors know now, take years off our life here on earth, One study estimated a stressful lifestyle could take 2.8 years off your life.

V28-30 Two different pictures here. One is that of the beauty of wild flowers. These still grow on the slopes of hills around Galilee. So literally Jesus audience might just have had to look around them to see this. Red and blue and purple would have been like the robes of Solomon, who was incredibly wealthy. The wild flowers were though often cut in the spring, along with the grasses and bundled up as fuel for the fire ovens. So they had a very short window of life. This is not saying that Jesus is going to give us flash designer clothes. It is saying that if God cares for his creation that is so temporary, then how much more will God provide what you need. For us the instruction might be to look around us at God's creation. If God has put such care and provision into his creation, how much more will he look after us.

One of the ways we combat worry is to give thanks for everything he does provide. Cultivating an attitude of gratefulness is to see everything we have as provision from God. When we worry we have taken our eyes off God and onto our circumstances. Looking at creation can draw us back to focusing on God.

V31-34 This is the climax of this passage. Seek the kingdom of God that is makes God's will your no 1 priority. Live righteously simply means to live out God's will in our behavior. Kindness, goodness, generosity, giving to those in need, sharing the good news. And God will look after our needs. Not our wants. Not a promise of wealth as the prosperity teachers will tell you. But he will provide for you.

What thing is getting in the way of God being the master of your life What treasure is taking the place of God. What are you giving more attention to than God and what he wants for your life?

The problem with this passage is not understanding it. The problem is that it requires some action.

It challenges our priorities. The primary god in the West is Mammon, but he disguises himself so we cannot even see it, until someone from overseas comes and challenges us. They wonder why as Western Christians hoard our wealth, and will not share it with our brothers and sisters who are barely surviving. The god of this age has blinded us.

It challenges our hearts. Because the stuff we worry about is what we value the most. And often our worry is about physical stuff and we give little attention to God and his will. Yet all we have is from him anyway.

When you came in, you were given 10c. It represents this treasure that it getting in the way of God. Invite you to come during the worship and lay it at the cross, if you are willing to give it over to God. If you are willing to confess to God. God I have allowed this to take your place and I want to give it back to you. I will not let it dominate my life any more.

This coin can also represent your worries. As food prices rise and mortgage rates go up, and retirement looms, you might have found yourself getting anxious. How are we going to make ends meet. How are we going to cope.

By laying the coin down, you are saying. God, all I have is from you. So I will let go of my worry and trust that you will provide. I will take a step of faith this morning. You are God. So I trust you to provide. Not only for me and my family. But also enough so that I can bless others and invest in your kingdom.

The act of bringing the coin is symbolic. The real action is what you do outside of here. The real action is when you take the steps you need to take to allow God who you give the most attention to. The real action is when you orientate your life around God's will and purposes. The real action is when you alter your attitude towards the stuff you do have and the stuff that you might want to acquire. The real action is when you choose to spend your resources differently. The real action is when you decide to put some of what God has given you to kingdom purposes. The real action is when you share generously with some less well off. The real action is when you stop worrying about whether you have enough and bring your needs day by day to God trusting him to provide. The coin is just symbolic of the real work.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

Share how if you have been overseas it has altered your perspective of our own culture

Do you think Mammon is a spiritual power? How does this challenge your idea of spiritual warfare?

What can help us live with an eye on eternity rather than just this present life?

Jesus language has led to some extreme views. Discuss each of these. Have you seen this at work? How do we find the right balance?

Brainstorm on some practical ways we can in a consumer society seek first God's kingdom and resist the pull of Mammon.



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