

Serving What Is Temporary or What Is Eternal?

Matthew 6:19-24

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November 2, 2025

Well, good morning. Welcome to Christ the King. If you are a guest or a visitor, if we haven't met, my name is Penny and I'm the senior pastor here and it is good to be with you. If you are a guest, you're joining us in the midst of a sermon series looking at the Sermon on the Mount. So this, Jesus is probably most famous teaching the Sermon on the Mount. It's found in Matthew's Gospel in chapters 5 through 7. And this morning, we're going to be in Matthew 6. So if you have a Bible, you can turn to Matthew 6. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the chairs and we project the passage on the screen as well. You can follow along there. And if you came here this morning and you don't have a Bible and you would like one, please take that one that's in the chair. It is our gift to you. We would love for you to have it because we think that the Word of God is the most important word that we have and that we can hear. And so it's good for us to have a copy of it.

But if you've been with us for the last number of weeks as we've been going through the Sermon on the Mount, then you'll remember that I've been saying that the Sermon on the Mount is about what the Kingdom of God is to look like and what the people in this Kingdom, we, what we are to look like and how we are to live and what we are to embody. What are the virtues and ethics that we are to be equipped with? And so we've heard so far that the Kingdom of God is a place where the poor in spirit and peacemakers, that they are blessed. We've heard that as Kingdom people, we are to be people who embody truth and righteousness. And we do this not just with our outward actions, but we do it with our inward heart motivations as well. We've heard from the Sermon on the Mount that the Kingdom of God is a place marked where we love our enemies, not hate them. And we live out our faith to please God, not for the approval of man.

In the Kingdom of God, we pray the prayer that the Lord Jesus taught us to pray. And we say, your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And not just on earth, but that means that His Kingdom come and His will be done in our lives, in every part of our lives, with our words, with our actions, with our thoughts, and with our deeds. And that's what we heard last week, right? Last week, we spent time going through the *Lord's Prayer* and looking at the various things that Jesus is calling us, inviting us to pray. And one of the main ones was that very thing, your Kingdom come, your will be done. And so coming off of that, Jesus is now calling us to examine. As we pray and we ask God's will to be done in this world and to be done in our lives, we are now called to examine our lives and to ask the question, what do we treasure? As Kingdom people, what is it that we are going to hold on to? How are we appropriating things like possessions and money? In the Kingdom of God, who or what will we serve? Well, that's what Jesus is taking up in Matthew 6. So let's follow along, beginning in verse 19. Jesus says,

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, 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 in you is darkness, how great is

the darkness! “No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money.”

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Father, we thank you for this portion of your Word. We thank you that your Spirit has given it to us. And we ask now that as we come to it, that you would help us. For, Father, we need your help to know what it means to be servants of the King, to know what it means to live as your kingdom people. And so we ask that you would meet with us, that you would soften our hearts and open our eyes and unplug our ears, that we would see your grace, your glory, your goodness. So be with all those who are attentive to your Word. Be with the one who preaches. Allow my words to honor you. We pray all this in Christ's name. Amen.

Serving Treasure

So as I was thinking about this sermon this week, I came to the realization that it's been quite a long time since I've talked about the *Lord of the Rings* from the pulpit and am wanting to continue to keep up my Presbyterian bona fides. No, but in reality, as I was thinking about this sermon, I couldn't help but think about the Lord of the Rings. That wonderful story, y'all are familiar with it, of Frodo, this hobbit who's on a journey and he's taking a ring into the enemy territory to destroy it in the land of Mordor on Mount Doom, right? That's what he's doing. And along the way, as he's journeying, we come across these various characters, these incredible people, heroes like Gandalf and Aragorn, horrendous villains like Sauron and Saruman. But for all the villains and all the heroes that we come across in the *Lord of the Rings*, one of the most important characters is this one individual, this character that at times looks like a terrible villain, but at other times he might actually be a friend. We're not really sure. That's the character Gollum, right? Gollum is this creature who wasn't always called Gollum. He was once called Smeagol, and he was part of the river people, and he was very similar to a hobbit.

But something has changed in Gollum. Something has transformed him. You know if you've read the stories or you've watched the movies that Gollum has become infatuated. He's been captured by the ring of power. And so his entire life now is oriented around this one ring, right? His entire focus, everything about him is about the ring. And so he holds the ring, and he stares at the ring, and he plays with the ring, and he says, my precious, right? I won't try to do the voice. And when he loses the ring, he searches for it, and he'll steal to get it back. He'll even kill because his entire life is about serving one thing. It's about serving his precious. It's about serving his treasure. Now of course, I don't think any of us sit around our homes, in our living rooms, or maybe our offices, and we play with a ring, and we mumble precious, right? We don't do that. But we serve something, don't we? Bob Dylan once sang, “you may be an ambassador to England or France. You might like to gamble, or you might like to dance. You may be the heavyweight champion of the world. You might be a socialite with a long string of pearls.” And then he goes on, and he mentions other people and other careers, right? “You could be a rock and roll addict. You could be a businessman, a doctor, a state trooper. You could be rich or poor. You could be blind or lame. And every one of us, every one of you, you're going to have to serve somebody.” And Dylan was right. You're right. You're going to serve somebody or something. For Gollum, he served the ring.

But what about us? Jesus says in verse 24 of our passage, no one can serve two masters. For either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise

the other. You see, Jesus knows that we are going to serve someone or something. And so he warns us. He warns us about the danger of serving treasure. That's how our passage began. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal." Now, that word there, treasure, it can have a very broad meaning. And it actually can be broad enough that it can encompass anything on earth. That our treasure could be the praise of man. It could be recognition. It could be notoriety. It could be degrees. It could be titles. It could be family. It could be health. It's broad enough it could encompass that. But you notice how Jesus focuses our attention to what this treasure might be.

In verse 24, he brings up God and money. And so it seems like what Jesus is primarily concerned about, his primary focus is on money, on wealth, and monetary treasure. Now, in our day, we associate wealth with bank accounts and with cars and with homes and with 401ks and IRAs, right? This is what we associate with wealth. But in the time of Jesus's day, it wasn't bank accounts and retirement funds. It was clothing and precious metals. Those were the things that were associated with wealth. And that's actually why Jesus brings up moths and rust and how they destroy. How they ruin those things that people were clinging to for wealth. A moth and a rust, they destroy. They get rid of that thing that they were clinging to. And by invoking moth and rust and invoking how these things can be lost, Jesus is pointing to how temporary they are. I mean, think about a moth, right? A moth is small. It's actually quite fragile and weak, right? Like, I could just kill it right there, right? Like, it'd be gone. I'd have a little dust on my fingers, right? Because that's what moths have. But, you know, it doesn't take a lot of effort or a lot of work to kill them.

And yet, for how small and seemingly inconsequential they are, if you put moths in your drawers or your closet and you come back a month later, it'll be ruined, right? And if that's where your wealth is, then you would want to ensure that a moth couldn't get there, right? That a moth, this inconsequential little insect, could have such significance over that thing that you hold dear. A rust, it eats away at metal. Or thieves, they take what they want. Jesus is pointing to the fact that our earthly treasure is temporary. It's here today and it is gone tomorrow. It's like a vapor. It's gone. The author of Ecclesiastes in chapter 5 talking about humanity said, "as he came from his mother's womb, he shall go again naked as he came and shall take nothing for his toil. Shall take nothing for his toil." The things we toil after, money and possessions and wealth, they're temporary. And we know this, right? In fact, we know it so well that we have cliches, like you can't take it with you. And yet, it's still enticing, isn't it? It still pulls at our hearts.

I mean, why is it so enticing? Well, I think wealth and possessions and money, I think that it's enticing because of what they promise. They promise security and safety and power and prestige, right? Because if I have wealth and I've stored up for myself wealth, then it doesn't matter if the market takes a little bit of a dip. I've got my storehouse. It doesn't matter if prices go up or down. I've got my savings. Or the prestige that comes with it, right? I can buy that car, that house, those clothes, and people will think that I'm put together, that I'm somebody, that they want to know me. Right? This is what they promise. They promise that we can find security, wealth that promises that we can garner attention.

Now, listen, don't hear what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that we shouldn't save, that we shouldn't plan. In fact, the Bible, the Bible speaks about that. The Bible tells us that we're supposed to be financially prudent and we're to plan and we're to provide for our families, places in like Proverbs 6 and Matthew 25 and 1 Timothy 5. And yet, for all of our financial savvy and for the size of our accounts and our attempts to create generational wealth, that is

not where our trust is to be. That is not what we are to serve. For Jesus said in verse 24, “you cannot serve God in money.” Now, if you grew up maybe in the church with older translations, that word money was translated *mammon*. And that's an appropriate translation. And the theologian Dan Doriani, he says about this word, he says it means more than currency or wealth. It's actually getting at something much deeper. It is getting at that which one trusts in. So, how do we know if we're trusting in earthly treasure?

Well, how do you respond when that treasure is threatened? When it's threatened to be taken away? Do you remember the rich young ruler? This man who came to Jesus in the Gospels and he said to Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” And Jesus said to him, “Oh, that's easy. Keep the commandments”, right? And he lists off the commandments, you know, do not commit adultery, do not steal, all the others, right? And the rich young ruler goes, “Great, I've done them.” But Jesus, perceiving the rich man ruler's heart and perceiving that he was wealthy, said, “Well, there's one more thing that you must do. You must sell all your possessions, give to the poor, and come follow me.” But the rich young ruler couldn't do that. He had no problem doing all the rest, but that one thing he could not give up. And so, he went away sad, we're told. He couldn't give it up.

That one thing, when Jesus said, give it away, when it was threatened to be taken from him, what did he do? He clung to it. He went away sad because his heart and his trust and his service was for earthly treasure. So, what about us? Well, how are we spending our money? What are we spending it on? Do we find ourselves dreaming about what we would do with another \$1,000, another \$5,000, another \$10,000? Is our giving transactional? What I mean by this is when we give to the church or to a ministry or to some organization, is it with strings attached? Like, I will give so long as you do X, Y, or Z. If we do that, have that kind of transactional sort of giving, then our generosity isn't really about giving, it's about yourself, about power and influence. And so, are we trusting in wealth and serving earthly treasure? If we want to know, follow the money and look at your heart. For Jesus said in verse 21: “where your heart, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Now, we know then in Jewish context, the heart was more than simply an organ that pumped blood to the rest of the body. The commentator Charles Quarles says that the heart referred to the center of a person's existence, the seat of spiritual, moral, and emotional life. The heart was the source of a person's thoughts, desires, decisions, and actions. And y'all, it is easy to give our hearts to earthly treasure. It is easy to do it individually. It's easy to do it corporately. Y'all, I feel it. That tug, that pull, a little bit more, just a little bit more. I feel it. I feel the promises that are enticing to serve earthly treasure. And I imagine I'm not the only one who feels it. So, will we serve our treasure? Well, the fact is, we will serve our treasure. That's not a debate. We will serve our treasure. The question is, what do we treasure? And what Jesus is calling us to do is to treasure him more than anything else. And when we begin to treasure him more than wealth and to serve him, we do this by turning our eyes to him.

Serving Christ

That's what we see in verses 22 - 23: “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, 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 in you is darkness, how great is the darkness?” Now, I imagine as we're reading through this passage and we came to this little parable, this metaphor, it maybe seemed a little out of place to us, right? Like, Jesus is talking about our treasure. Then at the end, he's talking about money. And in between, he talks about our eye

and lamps and darkness and light. It just seems kind of out of the blue. And in fact, there are some people who think that this is this, like, insertion of Jesus's teaching that really had nothing to do with anything else. Like, he kind of just went on a tangent, sort of. Like, y'all have seen people do, you know, you've probably seen me do this, right? You just kind of go off on a little tangent and then, oh, yeah, you're right. Let me come back, right? But actually, I think what Jesus is doing here, what his teaching in these verses is completely in keeping with what he has been saying.

So, I want you to think about what he says, right? The metaphor he's using. The eye is a lamp. So, when a lamp works right, it gives off light so that we can see what's ahead and where to go and where we're walking and to make sure we don't step on our kid's Lego in the middle of the room, right? Like, that hurts, right? We don't want to do that. So, we have a lamp. And when the lamp's working properly, we see it. But when the lamp's not working properly, we're in the dark. We're lost. We're going astray. And so, if we apply that to the eye, what Jesus is saying is that if your eye is bad, if it's blind, you're in the dark. You don't know where you're going. You don't know where to look. But if your eye is healthy, you see where to go. You see clearly what's ahead. And so, what Jesus is saying is that if your eye is working properly, you are going to fix your gaze on the good things. And where your gaze is fixed, that's where your life will go.

It reminded me of when I'm riding my bike. So, many of you know that I ride a bicycle on the road, a road cycle. And when you're riding, especially on the road, you need to keep your head on a swivel, okay? You need to be looking around all the time, right? Because there are people who drive who don't look for bikes. So, you're looking out for cars, and you're looking out for trucks, and you're looking out for pedestrians, and you're looking at the road itself to make sure that you don't hit a pothole or glass or whatever. And so, you're always looking around. But here's the thing. When you see that dangerous thing, like the pothole, like the pothole, you see it, but you don't fixate your eyes on it. You don't hold that because where you look, that's where the bike will go. Guarantee it. So, if you're staring at that pothole, you're going to run into the pothole. And then your ride's over. And so, you see the danger ahead. You look, you see the pothole, you see the glass, you see the stuff in the road, and you turn your gaze away from it. And you find the smooth part of the road, and you find the place that would be safe, and you steer clear of the danger. Where you fix your eyes is where you'll go.

And that's what Jesus is saying about our lives. Where we fix our eyes, that's what we'll cling to. It's another way of talking about the idea of giving our hearts to something. So, what are we looking at? What is our gaze fixed upon? What's interesting is that these words that Jesus used that translate healthy and bad, they can describe the health of an eye, but they can also describe the heart's attitude towards wealth, because in some contexts, that word healthy can be translated generous, and bad can be translated jealous. In other words, if you want to know what your heart is serving, or if your eye is bad, or what you are looking at, does jealousy reign in your heart? If you want to know if your heart is serving Christ, and your eye is healthy, is generosity the orientation of your heart? You see, Jesus is calling us to examine our hearts, to look at what we have set our gaze upon, and he's calling us to stop serving earthly treasure, and to serve eternal treasure. To serve Christ, that's what he's calling us to.

That's what we see in verse 20, "but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal." Verse 24, "you cannot serve God and money." You see, Jesus is calling us, excuse me, calling us to serve God, to

fix our gaze on Christ, and to give our hearts to the Lord, to store up treasure, not in this world, but in heaven.

So, what is that? What is treasure in heaven? Well, some people have argued that maybe this is talking about the good works that we do in this world. Maybe it's about righteous living, but I actually think that the ultimate thing that Jesus is talking about, what treasure in heaven is, is the kingdom of heaven itself, and the reason why I think this is because in Matthew 13, when Jesus gives us kingdom parables, he likens the kingdom to what? To a pearl of great worth, or to a treasure that's buried in a field, and he says that it's of such great worth that you will sell everything that you have to buy up that piece of land, or to get that single pearl, and he says that is the kingdom of heaven, that we would be willing, it is, its treasure is so great that we'd be willing to give up everything to get it. It is of greatest treasure. It's Jesus, it's living today in light of eternity, and we do this, we live this way because what is promised isn't temporary, but it's eternal, and it's eternally secure. Did you see? He said it's where moth and rust and thieves, they lay waste to earthly treasure, but they have no power over heavenly treasure. What Jesus is offering and what he gives is incorruptible.

In 1 Peter chapter 1, Peter says that God, “according to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance.” Now listen, listen to how he describes this inheritance and how it is different than what we inherit from this earth. An inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. That is what awaits us. An inheritance that is promised to all who serve the Lord, and when we know this inheritance is imperishable, it's incorruptible, then why would we serve anything else? Why would we serve anyone else? When we live in service of Christ and know his inheritance in heaven is secure, that frees us to no longer serve earthly treasure. When we are living for Christ, then money becomes just money, and things become just things, and when they're just money, and when they're just things, and we don't have to store them up, and we don't have to grasp them, and we don't have to white-knuckle them and hold on to them, then we can simply give them away, and we can be generous with them, and if we lose them but we still have Christ, then we have really lost nothing at all.

You see, they can't give what they have promised. They can't give us worth and value and identity and security because they're temporary, but what Christ gives, it's eternal, and he secured eternity with his very life. Paul in 2 Corinthians 8 says, “Jesus, though he was rich, yet for your sake became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” Isn't that beautiful? That Jesus, the one who deserves all the heavenly riches, the one who dwelt in heaven, who was worshiped by angels, he became poor and took on flesh, and he went to the cross and gave his life. He became poor so that by his life of poverty we would become rich. Not rich in a material sort of a way, but rich in a heavenly way.

And so, friends, we give our hearts in service to Christ, and we fix our gaze upon him. As the hymn puts it, we turn our eyes upon Jesus. We look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace. We give our lives, our hearts, our gaze, every part of our being over in service to Christ, because he is the one who has secured for us eternity. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you. Thank you that we have the greatest treasure that has ever been given. We have your son, who has given his life and death, who has been given in resurrection so that we would have life. And so we pray, Father, that we would turn our eyes away from earthly treasure and we would fix them on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Let us gaze upon him. Let our hearts be given over to him. Let us walk in service to him,

knowing we will serve something. Let us serve Christ, our greatest treasure. We pray all this in his name, and God's people said together, Amen.