Jesus' Motive for Giving

Matthew 6: 19-24

Pastor Bryan Clark

Two weeks ago Patty and I climbed on the back of this Harley Davidson and spent five days riding in the Black Hills. It was wonderful. This is a Harley Davidson Wide Glide, and it is a sweet bike. And just in case you were wondering, "Yes, we were very smooth." (Laughter) Everything is different when you're on the back of a motorcycle. It's a multi-sensory experience. Everything you see looks different; what you feel is different; what you smell is different. One of the mornings, before we left the motel in the Black Hills, it rained for about an hour and then we took off through the hills and the smell of pine was just wonderful. You just don't get that in a car. When you're on a motorcycle you notice different things—you pay more attention to the weather, the temperature, the forecast. Everything's different.

One other thing that we found is very different. Patty and I are both *Junkers;* I've confessed that sin before. We just love junk—kind of antique stuff, but the *junkier* the better. So oftentimes you'll find us at some sort of a junkyard and it wouldn't be unusual to find us there with a pick-up. Well, when you're at a junkyard with a pick-up, kind of anything goes. Now the Black Hills does junk as well as anybody and you find those shops all over. But when you're on a motorcycle, it's all different. We must have passed dozens and dozens and dozens of those places. I think we only popped into one or two and there's a reason for that---because no matter what you see, you can't take it with you. There's no room. Imagine the scene: We go to all these different places, purchase all this stuff, pile it up by the side of the road, get on the motorcycle and leave it all behind. You'd have to ask the question, "What's the point of that?" Everything looks different when you understand you can't take it with you. That's what we want to talk about this morning.

As you see this motorcycle through the morning, I want you to think of it as a metaphor—a reminder through our talk—that no matter what you accumulate in this world, you leave it behind. You can't take it with you. So what's the point of spending a lot of money on something that you'll eventually just leave by the side of the road? Every single one of us will either live for the things of this world or will live for the things that will last forever. Jesus is going to tell us that there really isn't much middle ground. If you have a Bible, turn with us this morning to Matthew, Chapter 6—a very familiar passage. We've looked at it a number of times but it's just one of those basics that we need to go back over from time to time. If you're visiting with us this morning, "Yes, we are talking about money". We usually do that a couple of times in August and a couple of times in January, but we don't apologize for that. I would suggest to you that there are very few areas in your life where you have the potential to mess up your life as much as in the area of your finances. The Bible has a lot to say that can spare you a lot of heartache if you listen to what God has to say.

In Matthew, Chapter 6, Jesus is talking about a number of very practical matters. He gets to verse 19, and that's where we pick it up:

> **"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; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (*NASB, Matthew 6:19-21)

Jesus gives us a "Do not" and He gives us a "Do". Do *not* store up for yourselves treasures on earth. Why? Because ultimately you will lose them. In the ancient world, if you accumulated some degree of wealth, it was always a challenge to know, "What do you do with that? How do you protect that?" It wasn't like they could go down to a neighborhood bank or something. So they were constantly trying to figure out, "How do they hold on to their wealth?" It wasn't at all unusual that people would put their wealth into garments—clothing. In essence they would wear their retirement account because it was a way to protect it, to make sure it didn't get stolen. But, as the text talks about, "What do you do when you're sleeping?" Maybe the moths get in or rust—which is a Greek word that could also be translated *rats*, I think probably better. The moths and the rats get in and they consume your retirement account. So there was this awareness that, once you accumulate wealth, it's very hard to hold onto. But even if you keep it till the day you die, you don't get to take it with you. You leave it behind. So Jesus says, **"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,"** because at the end of the day, you don't get to keep them.

Is there an alternative? Yes, there's an alternative! **Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven**. Now there's some debate about what's meant by in "heaven". The word "heaven" is sometimes synonymous with the idea of the Kingdom of God. Are we talking about some sort of bank account in heaven or what does that phrase mean? I think we can easily say what Jesus is *not* saying is that there's going to be some sort of a materialistic structure in heaven as there is on earth. There aren't going to be people with big houses and small houses and nicer things and bigger bank accounts, and all of that. We aren't going to take a materialistic system and move it to heaven. That's just silly. But I think what He *is* saying is store up treasures for yourselves in God's economy, in the things of God, which are now and forever. When you invest what you have in the things of God, you are investing in that which lasts forever. There's a paradox in all of this: What you choose to keep, you lose; what you choose to give to God, you keep forever. It's just the opposite of what we tend to think. We in our world today have banks and different investment vehicles. It's certainly different than the first century. But we've learned in the last year that our money is not nearly as secure as we thought it was. And the fact is, no matter what you do, at the end of the day, you can't take it with you. Why spend your resources on something you're ultimately going to leave by the side of the road? That's what Jesus is saying.

Now when He says, "**Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven,"** the language there is really interesting. What does He mean by that? We would say that the ultimate motive for giving would be to glorify God. You really can't argue with that. Everything in our lives—the ultimate motive—should be to give God glory. But that's a very mature motive. There's also a reality that throughout the Scriptures, God seeks to motivate us by telling us that doing things God's way is really good for us. When I trusted Jesus as Savior, I understand today that ultimately that brings God glory and that's very meaningful to me today. But the day I trusted Christ as Savior, that wasn't my motive. When somebody presented the Gospel to me, they didn't present it in the sense that, "If you do this, it will give God glory." It was, "You're a desperate sinner and you need help." And *my* motive at that moment was, "I need a Savior." I did it for *me*, because I was desperately lost. Throughout the New Testament there's a very clear message that when we choose to trust God, when we choose by faith to live out God's value system, not only does it bring God glory, but it's good for me. God loves me. God

doesn't want me to waste my life. God doesn't want me to mismanage what He's given me. So God understands that if I do it His way, not only does it bring Him glory, but it's good for me. Because the prosperity preachers have so misused some of these New Testament texts, I think sometimes the pendulum has swung too far. If you listen to a prosperity preacher, they'll convince you that if you give God $100, God will give you back $1000. So we're basically just giving to get; it's a *good deal.* There's nowhere where the Bible says that. But the Bible does say that if you give to God, God gives back. As a matter of fact it says that over and over again. God is a very generous God. God wants to bless us. If we rightly steward what He's given us, He wants to give us more so that we'll rightly steward that, so He can give us more. He delights in that.

There's a passage that we're going look at later this fall, when we're working our way through II Corinthians, in Chapter 9 that says, "If you give generously, God will give generously, but if you give sparingly, God will give sparingly." Clearly that passage is to motivate us to understand that when we do things God's way, God delights in being generous in return. Now that doesn't necessarily mean money. It certainly doesn't exclude money, but God will bless us with the things that ultimately matter, that ultimately make life meaningful. Life will be more if we choose to trust God and give to God and live for the things that ultimately matter.

So what are we talking about? Let's get this as practical as we can. What does this mean? First of all we have to understand that here in the United States of America we are extremely blessed. Even those among us at the lowest income level live better than the overwhelming majority of the world. We don't need to feel guilty about that; we need to appreciate that. We need to be thankful for that. According to 1Timothy, Chapter 6, we should enjoy what God has given to us. It isn't a contest to see who can be the *most poor*. There's nothing spiritual in that. Poverty is not a virtue. We get into this thing where, "Whoever gives away the most is more spiritual." Where does that end? And that's not what the Bible is teaching. The fact of the matter is: We all have stuff. There's nothing wrong with that. I think God delights in our enjoyment of what He has given us. I Timothy 6 says, "Enjoy it; be generous with it." You choose how you spend your money; I choose how I spend my money. We have to be careful we aren't judging other people for how they spend their money. You may choose to spend your money on one thing; somebody else chooses to spend it on something else. It's not a contest. There isn't something more spiritual than something else. We all have stuff. There's nothing wrong with having a nice house, nothing wrong with having a nice car, nothing wrong with stuff. We all have it. The core issue is this: *What are you living for?* That's what Jesus is talking about. At the end of the day, what are you *living* for? Are you living for stuff? Are you living for more money, more money in the account? Are you living for the things of this world? Jesus says, "**Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is."**

My experience in the ministry would be that almost every Christian will automatically say, "Oh yeah, I'm living for the things of eternity." That response is very easy. "Hey, what are you living for?" "Oh, I'm living for the things that last forever." But Jesus took this to a very practical level and said, "You know we probably need to have a barometer. We probably need to have a very practical way to measure that, because it's too easy to say that." So what's the barometer? Where your treasure is, *that's* where your heart is. You cannot say that you're living for the things of eternity if God doesn't get your money. That's what Jesus is saying.

So how much money? What are we talking about? Five dollars a week? Ten dollars a week? Let's see if we can at least put some sort of a framework on it so we can have that discussion.

There's discussion as to whether or not the concept of tithing—that's ten percent—is required in the New Covenant. It certainly was in the Old Covenant. I don't think it is. I don't think you can make that case. What we do understand though, is in the Old Covenant there was the concept of a minimal standard and that was a tithe—that was ten percent. And actually there were three different tithes, plus once every three years, so if you're going to make the case that the Old Testament concept of tithing is active today, it's not ten percent; it's thirty-three percent. Usually when I tell people that, they backpedal really fast: "Well, I agree with you, Pastor. I don't think it's active either." (Laughter) But almost all scholars agree that the Old Testament concept of a tithe is a minimal standard. As a matter of fact we would say that if that was the standard under the Old Covenant, certainly it would never be less, understanding the realities of the New Covenant. So let's just put that as a parameter. It would be fair to say then, if God doesn't get at least ten percent—that's not the goal; that's the minimal standard—then God doesn't have your treasure. You're just tipping God. And if God doesn't have your treasure, according to Jesus, God doesn't have your heart. Jesus is saying, "That's a measurement of what you're ultimately living for."

Now, as soon as I say that, there's panic in people's eyes. You're running your budget and you're saying, "Wow, I'm doing the numbers. There's just no way!" I would say to you, "That's exactly the point!" There's no way because that's not what you're living for. You've extended yourself into the things of the world because that's what matters to you. That's what you're living for. The fact that there's no margin for God is exactly what Jesus is saying. That's reflective of the fact that He's not what you're living for. That's why there's no margin in your budget for that. That's the point! It's important to understand: It's supposed to cost us something. There's this great Old Testament story where David wants to offer a sacrifice to God but he needs a piece of ground. So he offers to buy a piece of ground. The owner of the ground says, "You know you don't have to buy this; I'll give it to you." David responds by saying, "No, I will not offer to God that which costs me nothing." It's important to understand: *The whole point of giving is it's supposed to be a sacrifice.* It's supposed to alter my lifestyle. It's supposed to cause me to think about what I'm living for. That's the whole point. If you've reached a point in your life where you're able to say to your accountant, "You know if you can find some money there that's really not doing anything, just throw that at God," you're missing the whole point! No matter how much money you've accumulated, if you aren't giving to the point where it dramatically affects daily decisions, where it affects your lifestyle, where there's a clear sense, "*This costs me something,"* you've missed the whole point! We understand that, even in human transactions. If on a very special occasion I choose to give Patty something I dug through a drawer and found, that I don't want anymore, how meaningful is that to her? The whole point of a meaningful gift is, "Hey, this cost me something." That's why handmade, homemade gifts are valuable; it's because there's a sense in which this cost me something and I did it for you. So we have to understand that giving is not supposed to be throwing God the leftovers. It's not tipping God. It's saying, "This is where my treasure is because this is where my heart is." And there has to be a sense of that sacrifice.

Now I think the Bible does teach that it's important to save. I think that's prudent. I think the Bible teaches that it's important to save for retirement. I think that's prudent. I think I can easily support that biblically. But I think the Bible also teaches that there's a point in which enough is enough. It's easy to justify hoarding under that umbrella. At some point we say, "That's adequate," and I'm now free to take what God has given me and use it for Kingdom purposes and not just simply accumulate more and more and more and more. You think with me: If you were to fall over dead today and you were to have this little conversation with Jesus

and He would say to you, "You know I gave you more than you needed but instead of using that for Kingdom purposes, you just kept hoarding it. I'm wondering why you did that." What answer do you think is going to cause Him to say, "Oh---I didn't understand that." Do we really think that God is giving us more and more so we can just stockpile more and more and more? At some point there has to be a realization that God gives us what He gives us to invest in the things that last forever.

Now I've brought this up before and I know a lot of people disagree but, as the years go by, I'm more and more convinced this is correct. So you're free to disagree. But I'm asking you to at least consider it—our concept of saving for these big chunks of inheritance to our children. I think it's just wrong; I think it's unbiblical. I don't see anywhere in the Bible where it supports that and I think there are several passages that would say just the opposite. There are several ways that I think that's wrong. Number one: All you need to do is talk to the people around you. Oftentimes that does more damage than good to the people you love. There are a lot of people in this congregation that would say that's true. But beyond that, you have to think about why God gave you those resources. Is it just to stockpile more and more and more and more—to hoard that rather than to invest that, to use that to build God's kingdom? What I want most for my children is that I want them to be very generous toward the things of God. And the best way for them to learn that is for me to model that. When I accumulate large sums of money and I hoard it in an account somewhere to pass it on to them, what I've modeled for them is not generous giving to the Kingdom. What I've modeled for them is hoarding. Why would I expect for them to do otherwise? I think a life well lived is that, on my deathbed, I give away my last penny. "God, I took everything You gave me and I tried to steward it well for Your purposes." I think that's biblically correct.

When we hear these stories of food and money being donated for starving children in Third World countries and then we hear that the dictators took the money and the food and hoarded it for themselves and it never went to the starving children, we're outraged---and rightfully so. The question I'm asking is, "Are you sure we're different than that?" If God has given you more than you could possibly need to reach people who are lost and without Jesus, and it never gets beyond your bank account, how is that different? You need to imagine the conversation with God, when God asks you why you did that. What answer do you think is going to be acceptable to Him? Jesus says, **"Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is."**

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)

That's a great metaphor but it's a little bit confusing. The ancient world understood the eye to be kind of a lamp to the body. As the eye goes, so goes the body, you might say. The idea is this: In both the Old and New Testaments the idea of an eye has to do with covetousness. You remember when John says in 1 John, "Do not love the world or the things in the world," he talks about the lust of the flesh and then the lust of the eyes. The eyes represent covetousness— how we view the things of this world. So what he's saying here is when your eye is clear—in other words you see this correctly—you see that the treasures of this earth are lost and the treasures of heaven are retained forever. When you get a clear understanding that you can't take it with you—when your eye is clear—your whole body will be clear. In other

words, when you get this one right, you're going to tend to be spiritually correct in the other areas of your life. But the sad reality is: If your eye is not clear, if you don't get this one right, if you don't see this as God sees it, you stand very little chance of getting the other spiritual areas of your life correct. That's what he's saying. And he says if your eye is dark, then how great is the darkness! We would say this is a core issue. It's not because God has a cash-flow problem. It's because this is an accurate measurement of your heart and, "Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is." I would suggest this morning, "Don't play games with this." I'm not the one that wrote this; God did. This isn't a hard passage to understand. Jesus is the One that said, "Where your treasure is, is where your heart is," so it causes us to back up and rethink what we're doing with our treasure.

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."**

Jesus lays it down: You can't have two lovers. He doesn't say you can't have two employers. He says you can't have two masters because a master is all about ownership. Either you're going to live for the things of this earth and you're going to leave them by the side of the road—and you have to ask the question, what sense does that make?—or you're going to invest your time, your talents, your money in the things that will last forever. You can't serve two masters.

Some of you, when you think about this, it's overwhelming. You say, "OK, I'm kind of getting you but I've made such a mess of my finances, I don't even know where to start." That's fine; we can help. We have financial coaches that are completely confidential. They'll come along side of you and they'll walk with you for six months or a year, and help you get your finances in order and help you get yourself back on track. If you're interested in that, you can stop by the **Time is Now** booth—there's one on the 100 level and on the 200 level. Just ask how you can get in touch with a financial coach. They'd be glad to help you.

I've done this enough years to know part of what's going to happen is this: Some of you right now, you're feeling some sense of guilt. "We probably need to make some changes." You're going to walk out these doors and there's going to be a sense of, "We probably need to do something different," but by tomorrow morning you're going to say, "Phew, he almost got to me yesterday but we survived another one; now we can wait till January." (Laughter) Hey, you don't answer to me. You're not accountable to me. I don't know anything about your finances but there is *Somebody* you're going to answer to and He knows what you've done with every penny. And you are going to be held accountable for how you have managed or stewarded what God has given you. When you get to the end of your days, you can't go back and redo it. There are no *"Do-overs"*. I'm going to give every effort I have to get you to invest what you've been given in the things that matter, because it's good for you and one day you will know that is true. What you do with that is up to you, but Jesus said it clearly: ***"Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is*.**"

Our Father, we're thankful this morning that You love us and You want what's best for us. Lord, You don't want us to waste our lives. You want us to be part of what lasts forever. You want to pour Your generosity back upon us. Lord, for that to happen we need to trust You. We need to be willing to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven, to give back to You as our declaration of faith, that we might wisely steward what we've been given for the things that ultimately matter. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Lincoln Berean Church, 6400 S. 70th, Lincoln, NE 68516 (402) 483-6512
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