Don’t Worry!

First in a new series, “Parables of Jesus on Money and Things”

# Scripture: Matt. 6:19-34

# Key Thought: Jesus used three objects from daily life to give us proper perspective on our stuff.

# Intro:

Today’s Gospel lesson is part of Jesus’ most famous sermon, called The Sermon on the Mount which is found in Matthew chapters 5-7. But the section that we read today, is really a self-contained sermon concerning our attitude toward our money and our stuff.

The passage contains several famous quotes from Jesus. One is;

You cannot serve God and mammon. Matt 6:24 NKJV

The Greek word translated “mammon” refers to our material possessions, that is our money and our things. So, Jesus’ purpose in this section is to help us with our attitude toward our possessions.

Jesus points to three objects to help us remember the lesson that he is teaching. I have brought contemporary representations of those three objects. Jesus was a master teacher and he used all three objects to reinforce the same overall lesson. Our three objects are a treasure chest represented by this keepsake box, a lamp represented by this lamp of my wife’s, and a vase of flowers I picked last evening.

# Treasure

## What is our treasure?

JoAnne and I picked up this little keepsake box many years ago when we were traveling in Spain during the time when I was in the military. Today we’ll pretend it is a treasure chest and use it to represent our treasures. All of us have something that is the most important thing for us. It might be a possession, such as a house or an antique inherited from Grandma, or a special car. Our treasure might be just money, stocks, 401K etc. For some of us the most important thing might be something less tangible, like status or success. Sometimes the thing most important to us is something we like to do like playing baseball, or playing golf, or traveling.

I want us to think for a moment about the thing or activity or intangible that is most important for us. Think about that as your treasure and mentally put it in your keepsake box? What is your treasure? That is really the question that Jesus is asking his disciples in this passage. He wants them to think.

Jesus has a warning for them. He wants to protect them from devastating loses and help them to be more successful in life. He is warning them that all the keepsakes, all the treasures that are tied to this world are bound to fail us. And being tied to them too tightly is not the way to a happy and abundant life.

## Treasures can disappoint

Jesus uses three examples of ways that material treasures of his day could disappear and disappoint.

First, he mentions moths. Now in Jesus day, wealth was often shown in fine clothes. Remember the role that they played in several key biblical stories. Joseph was set apart by his special multicolored coat that his father had given him (Gen. 37:3). When the children of Israel had conquered Jericho, one of the treasures that tempted Achan was a beautiful robe that he saw in the rubble (Joshua 7:21). Gehazi, servant of Elisha, was also tempted by fine clothes and sought to get them for himself from Naaman (2 Kings 5:22). But the problem with fine clothes of the day was that they contained wool and could be easily destroyed by the moths. Jesus was pointing out how easily the things that we treasure can disappear.

The second thing that Jesus mentions is usually translated as “rust.” However, the newest version of the NIV translates it more accurately as vermin which means mice and rats, etc. The literal meaning of the word has to do with “eating.” While rust does eat away metals, the way the word is usually used has to do with mice and worms eating away the stores of grain (Barclay p. 239). Stores of grain were another common way which people of that day accumulated wealth. Jesus is warning again that whichever way we store our things, they can still quickly disappear in this world.

Then Jesus mentions thieves. This reminds everyone that even when we think we have everything stored securely from the elements and from natural predations, human thieves still find a way to destroy.

What is the answer to this dilemma about treasures? Whatever kind of treasure is in our keepsake box, if it is an earthly treasure, it is vulnerable. Even if our treasure is an intangible thing like success, we should recognize how precarious and vulnerable it is. It can be easily lost or destroyed and since we have centered our life on it, our life can be devastated.

Jesus gives us the answer to our dilemma. We need a treasure that cannot be destroyed.

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matt 6:20-21 NIV

In another place Jesus warned,

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. John 6:27 NIV

We follow Jesus’ advice when we have our heart focused on him, on his values, on working for his kingdom. When he is number one in our hearts and lives and whatever else we really like is number two, then we can be the happiest. Loving Jesus first will help us keep our values in order. Having him at the top of our affections, will protect us from the devastations that occur when our earthly treasures disappoint or disappear. And best of all, when we are working for Jesus, we are laying up treasures that cannot disappear.

## What is treasure in heaven?

How do we characterize these kinds of treasures? That would be a sermon in itself. But allow me to briefly list three thoughts.

1. Treasure in heaven has to do with our character. This world is a preparation for the next. The fruits of the Spirit in us are permanent habits.

The only thing which a man can take out of this world into the world beyond is himself; and the finer the self he brings, the greater his treasure in heaven will be. William Barclay p. 242

1. Treasure in heaven has to do with service to God and others. True service to God and other people is costly in time, energy, and personal emotional investment, etc. But in Matthew 25:35, 36 Jesus cited just such service to others as the reason for heavenly rewards for those on the right side in the parable of the sheep and the goats.
2. Treasure in heaven has to do with generosity. Those things which we give to others and to God are not lost, they are the gifts to God, who records them. Jesus told us that not one cup of cold water given to a person in need would be forgotten (Matt. 10:42).

# Lamp

## “The eye is the lamp.”

The second illustration that Jesus uses to help us understand what he is talking about is a parable about the eye and a lamp. Jesus begins by saying;

The eye is the lamp of the body. (Matt. 6:22)

As is often true in Jesus teaching, he is speaking on more than one level at once. On the physical level Jesus is simply saying that it is through the eye that we receive light. When our eye is healthy, then our whole body is informed by the light that we see. In this sense the eye is the lamp of the body, meaning the organ that makes it possible for us to see things that reflect light.

The reason this passage can be considered parable is that Jesus is using our eyesight as an illustration. The illustration is partly hidden by the difficulty of translation. This is one of those places where if you compare different versions you will find almost as many translations as there are versions.

According to William Barclay's commentary, the words usually translated "single" and "evil" should be translated "generous" and "stingy" respectively. (Barclay suggests that we can find a similar use of the Greek "poneros" in the LXX of Deuteronomy 15:9, where the context is about reluctance to lend. Barclay suggests that the Greek word "haplous" is also used in Romans 12:8 and second Corinthians 9:11 to refer to liberality of giving (Barclay p. 245).) Knowing this, I really like the way this section is translated in the Complete Jewish Bible. Here is how it reads.

“Do not store up for yourselves wealth here on earth, where moths and rust destroy, and burglars break in and steal. Instead, store up for yourselves wealth in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and burglars do not break in or steal. For where your wealth is, there your heart will be also. ‘The eye is the lamp of the body.’ So if you have a ‘good eye’ [that is, if you are generous] your whole body will be full of light; but if you have an ‘evil eye’ [if you are stingy] your whole body will be full of darkness. If, then, the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can be slave to two masters; for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can’t be a slave to both God and money.   
Matt 6:19-24 CJB

As an interpreter, the clincher for me is that this way of understanding these two key words makes the whole passage hold together. An interpreter should always be asking how a passage fits with the passages next to it. Jesus is talking about where our treasures are in verses 19 through 21. He is warning us against holding onto earthly treasures which are easily lost. In verse 24, it is abundantly clear that Jesus is again warning against serving money as a master or a highest goal. Translating the word usually translated "single" as "generous" and the word usually translated "evil" as something like "miserly" pulls the whole passage together and gives it continuous and powerful verbal punch.

## Focus affects our life and our influence

Now let’s interpret this idea for today. We use phrases like, “He really had his eye on getting that blue corvette.” I remember marrying a couple many years ago; I asked them to share their big dreams with each other, so they could see if they were on a journey together. The man shared that his biggest goal in life was to own a Corvette. Well, talk about having your eye on an earthly treasure, he did.

Jesus is saying that the kind of focus that our mind’s eye has will either make our life darker or lighter. If we are focused on accumulating wealth, status, etc. for ourselves, our souls will grow darker, and our influence will be less than wholesome. But if our mindset is generous, if we are giving at heart, then our lives will be filled with joy and we will be a light in our corner of the world.

# Flowers

The third object lesson of Jesus was the flowers that grew outside, perhaps wildflowers where he was teaching since the phrase is “flowers of the field.” For my illustration I have included some daisies from my lawn.

Jesus is proceeding like a master thinker and teacher here. He is answering our chief objection before we have a chance to ask it. Our biggest excuse for collecting and keeping money and things for ourselves and being somewhat, or maybe more than somewhat miserly in the process is that we have to clothe ourselves and take care of our housing, and provide for our food etc, etc. We rationalize that we must worry about our future! But Jesus rebuts our best argument.

See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Matt 6:28-30 NIV

Jesus is reminding us that worrying is the opposite of having faith. The perspective that we need to remember is the one he gives us;

Your heavenly Father knows that you need them. Matt 6:32 NIV

Without that perspective, we will worry. Without that perspective we cannot have a generous heart and self-giving focus. Without out that perspective, our treasures will be laid up for ourselves. And we will be vulnerable, and unhappy and not so pleasant to be around.

The grudging eye distorts our vision; the generous eye alone sees clearly, for it alone sees as God sees. (William Barclay p. 247)

and Jesus says, having faith in God’s provisions has counter-intuitive results.

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. Matt 6:33-34 NIV

A highly acclaimed astronomer was giving an address on recent discoveries about the vast workings of our universe. The information was amazing!

When the astronomer fielded questions, someone asked, "Professor, after all you have told us about the complexity of our universe, do you think a God great enough to make such a world could be concerned about us mortals?" After careful thought, the professor answered, "It depends on how great your God is!"

Planet earth is a mere speck of dust traveling through space. And we, its passengers, might well be viewed as less noticeable than the tiny, almost invisible insects that we unwittingly trample underfoot. But God is not like man. .His power is so great that He sees us. He knows us. He cares for us. He seeks us. He meets our need.. Yes, this all-powerful God loves us.

The Christian faith affirms that the God who created and sustains the universe is great enough to know you, the creature He has made. He is great enough to care about you personally.

When I think how small and helpless we are in God's expansive and awesome creation, I’m thankful that His love is as great as His power. RW DeHaan

# Conclusion:

I conclude with a story about three people whose generous hearts brought mutual blessing to themselves and others.

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everal years ago Paul and Linda, SIL translators, were in Minnesota   
before leaving for a city in the Caucasus to join a Bible translation   
project. One Sunday at Paul's home church, a friend rushed up to   
him and said, ''There's someone here I think you should meet!" A lady

from Russia was visiting the church that day. In the course of their con-   
versation, Paul and Linda discovered she was from the same city in the   
Caucasus! She had emigrated to the U.S. 20 years before, and this was

the first time she had visited the church in Minnesota.

The lady asked Paul and Linda to look up her childhood   
friend whom she had been writing to for many years. It just so   
happened that her friend was a member of the language   
group Paul and Linda were assigned to work in-quite a coin-   
cidence since over 35 languages are spoken in the city where   
they would be working. She said her friend would take them   
in if they needed a place to stay.

After arriving in the city, Paul and Linda realized that the   
housing accommodations the local university had arranged   
for them weren't going to work out. They pulled out the   
address of the lady they had been told to contact, and some-   
one from the university took them to talk with her.

The lady told them she couldn't possibly take them in-her   
husband was dying of cancer. But she asked them to wait   
while she discussed the matter with him. A few minutes later   
she returned and told them her husband said she should take   
them in.

Their landlady's husband died three weeks later, while Paul   
and Linda were visiting a village with some of her relatives.   
Immediately upon their return they were able to help her in   
practical ways, such as serving refreshments to neighbors who

came by to offer condolences. In the weeks that followed, they were able   
to provide her companionship.

Linda reflects, "We were meant to be there for her; she was meant to   
be there for us. "

The translated gospel of Mark is now in print. As Paul and Linda con-   
tinue their work, they praise God for how He arranged for the perfect   
place for them to live when they first came to the Caucasus when it   
looked like there was no room at the inn .•

(From “In Other Words” – Christmas 1998)