

10. Earthly Wealth, Riches, and Anxiety

This study of the morality and ethics of Jesus has based its premise upon the way that Jesus introduced the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, starting in Matthew 5. Jesus predicated a change in moral and ethical behavior based on a change of the heart. The incorporation of the beatitudes into the heart equips us to turn away from immoral and unethical behavior. Nowhere in the Sermon on the Mount is this more important than in these present passages that deal with the temptation of earthly wealth and the anxiety that results from looking to this world for our reward. The true morality and ethics of Jesus lifts one from the snare of greed and covetousness and the anxiety that they create. In a world of “dog eat dog,” “get them before they get you,” “getting and spending,” and “keeping up with the Jones,” it is difficult, indeed, to live free of greed and covetousness. The anxiety comes from thinking that one is nothing without material gains. The Lord presents a set of bipolar directives – eternal principles. They become our topics of study.

Store up Treasures in Heaven

Matt 6:19-21: 19 *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

The first directive from the Lord is that we are not to store up treasures on earth. All worldly riches are transient and disappear amid moth, rust, and thieves. The Lord's positive command is to lay up treasures in heaven where moth and rust will never destroy them, and thieves will never steal them. These commands are counter to the ethics of the 21st century, where materialism reigns and people gain status and recognition from how much earthly wealth they have. The Lord's final statement in this passage is an eternal principle, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Get the heart right and treasures in heaven will follow.

Fill Your Mind and Body with Light

Matt 6:22-23: 22 *"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!*

The principal—the eye is the lamp of the body—reaffirms that filling our mind with light secures not only the mind of a person, but also the entire body of a person. On the other hand, if one fills the mind with darkness, how great is that darkness. This eternal principle secures once for all time the need to have the Lord dwell in us, and we in him. The ethics and morality of Christ begin from this light within. Paul wrote in Eph 3:16-19:

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

From the light within, Christians marshal all the fullness of God to overcome darkness.

You Cannot Serve Two Masters

Matt 6:24: 24 "No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and Money.

The third eternal principle is that "you cannot serve both God and Money." This principle draws its truth from a principle widely misunderstood in the world: "No one can serve two masters." The masters here are either God or Money, a dichotomous choice that leaves no other alternative. It is clearly an *either, or*. Money here was formerly translated *Mammon*, which translators transliterated from *mamonas*, a common Aramaic word for riches. The word personifies money; hence, they capitalize Money. The ethical choice is between God and Money. Who will our master be? The Lord of heaven and earth who promises that we can marshal all of His fullness; or Money, which promises decaying, rusting treasures that thieves break in and steal.

Do Not Worry about Your Life

Matt 6:25-32: 25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 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, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

If God is the master, one need not worry about this life. The Christian is ethically and morally divorced from the treasures of this life. With the divorce, comes the Lord's enunciation of the eternal principle, "Do not worry about your life." Suddenly, it is very clear. The earthly treasures and Money of which the Lord speaks is not just the earthly treasures and money of the truly rich. They are our very own money and riches right down to that which we use to sustain our lives from day to day. A poor man can serve Money with fervor equal to the fervor of the world's richest tycoon. Therefore, do not worry about what you will eat, drink, or wear. The Fathers knows that we need them. The acceptance of this high ethical standard regarding food, drink, and clothing is a test of the Christian's very faith. Thus the Lord chastises us, "O you of little faith."

Seek First His Kingdom and His Righteousness

Matt 6:33: 33 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.

"Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" and "do not worry about tomorrow" are commands summarizing the entire passage. Eternal principles follow these commands:

- All these things will be added to you
- Tomorrow will worry about itself
- Each day has enough trouble of its own

Fear and anxiety flee the Christian who has God as the one and only Master.

Conclusion:

Rev 21:6-8 presents a striking contrast between those who choose to follow the ethics and morality of Jesus and those who do not:

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

Let us put aside earthly wealth, riches and anxiety and serve only God, the Father.

Study Questions from the Scriptures

1. Matthew 5: What had to change before there could be a change in the moral nature of man?
2. Matt 6:19-21: What happens to treasures stored up on earth? What happens to treasures stored up in heaven? Where will your heart be?
3. Matt 6:22-23: With what must one fill his eyes? When is a body full of darkness?
4. Eph 3:16-19: Where do Christians find power? How does Christ dwell in our hearts? How does Paul describe the love of Christ? With what are Christians filled?
5. Matt 6:24: How many masters can one serve? What will happen if one tries to serve two masters? If you serve God, what can you not serve?
6. Matt 6:25-27: About what are Christians not to worry? Who cares for the birds of the air? What is the effect of worry on our lives?
7. Matt 6:28-32: Why do you worry about clothes? Who worries about food, drink, and clothing? What does the heavenly father know that we need?
8. Matt 6:33: What are we to seek first? How should we treat tomorrow?
9. Rev 21:6-8: Who is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End? Who will be given to drink from the river of the water of life? Whose place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur?