



## HG209: The Sermon On The Mount **What Do You Treasure?**

Matthew 6:19-34

Home Group Study Notes

1 November 2020 - Rachel Orford



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group  
with you, along with any previous notes and other  
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



### **Welcome** (10 mins) *Ice Breaker*

You need to flee your home (because of some unspecified danger which only happens in films) and you can only take 3 possessions with you. What do you take?



### **Looking Upwards** (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon

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## Introduction

It should be no surprise that Jesus would want to warn us of the pitfalls we could come across, which distract us from claiming our inheritance and taking our place in the kingdom. After all, it's what he came into the world for - to save mankind and to ensure that as many people as possible make it into the Kingdom. He often does this by challenging us on all kinds of issues, encouraging us to search our hearts and be honest with ourselves. And in today's passage it is the turn of our "stuff" - our possessions and our wealth - our treasures - or rather our relationship to them. 16 of Jesus's 38 parables focus on how we handle our money and possessions and apparently (although I'm not sure how this is calculated) 15% of his words are on the subject of money. So it must be something that is key to good living and he must also know what a challenge it is for us. As Billy Graham said "If a person gets his attitude toward money straight, it will help straighten out almost every other area in his life."

So how does Jesus get us to think about the question "What do we treasure?" in this passage?" What does he ask us to consider about the things we own?

## What do we plan to do with them?

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth" says Jesus. Does this mean we not allowed to keep *anything*? Notice that it says, "Do not store up *for yourselves* treasures on earth." It's not about whether or not we save up money or collect things, but he is about our *motive* for doing so. If we're storing up money and possessions only for our own benefit, that is not a good thing. If we keep on piling up more and more stuff beyond what we need for the necessities of life, what is our purpose in doing so? What do we plan to do with all that wealth? Perhaps it's not surprising that a lot of de-cluttering has gone on during the last six months - with possessions being pared down, given away, shared and re-purposed, as people have spent time reassessing what they found important. Jesus would have approved of this - particularly if our plans involve putting our wealth to good use in serving God and our fellow human beings. He's not censuring us for saving for a rainy day or buying new things if when we need them. The trouble arises when we are driven by greed in order to benefit ourselves only.

And he points out the futility of storing up things anyway - because things - earthly things decay (eaten away by moths and rust), get destroyed or even stolen. Even the latest equipment becomes obsolete and is replaced by the next version, clothes go out of fashion and every day, homes and buildings are demolished to make way for the new.

So instead Jesus urges his listeners to "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven." What might this mean? We all know what our treasures on earth are, but what will be our treasure in heaven? Jesus was talking about less tangible things. He tells us surprisingly little about what we will find in heaven - but we know that is a real place, the dwelling place of God and that it is perfect - our lives there will be faultless; there will be rest and peace and joy. And the best thing about it is that it is eternal - it is forever and cannot be eroded. It cannot be stolen from us.

We know that there will be rewards in heaven because Jesus tells us so on many occasions. And it's not just by ensuring we have good motives for the use of our wealth that we will be rewarded. In the preceding verses which we know as the Beatitudes Jesus teaches about the very qualities we need to foster to claim enter the Kingdom of Heaven - to see God, to be comforted, to receive mercy. No one can say that He doesn't give us any clues. In Luke 6:35 he says "love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then *your reward will be great*". If our love for God and our fellow human beings is the most important thing in our lives, then Jesus tells us that that this is where our hearts will be. This will be what motivates us. Our earthly treasures will simply be a tools in our hands that we can use to do good.

### **Are they a distraction?**

This becomes a bit cryptic now, because Jesus seemingly changes the subject and starts talking about something more physical - our eyesight - calling our eyes the lamps of our bodies. On one level I think Jesus *is* asking us to consider what it is we spend our time looking at - what sort of things we are drawn to. Because unfortunately our default setting is not to focus on heavenly things but on worldly things.

But when we find references to our eyes in scripture, what follows is often about our inner, spiritual vision. In chapter 1 of his letter to the Ephesians Paul says that "I pray that *the eyes of your heart* may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people". And we should pray this for ourselves too. Our aim should be to improve our spiritual vision (the light within us) so that we can discern what God is saying to us and what he wants us to do. Serving God rather than being self serving is the way to restore this inner vision if it has become clouded. Because if the light within us is darkness then, "how great is that darkness" says Jesus. In our society we very seldom know complete darkness. Even in the dead of night there is light pollution that means we are still able to see - except when there is a power cut and then of course we are unable to find our way. Jesus is telling us that this is what it is will be like if we are continually distracted by all the appealing things we see in the world; our inner light will become dimmed. If instead we set our sights on God and the things he has in store for us - he will show us the way ahead. The psalmist knew this when he wrote in Psalm 119 "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."

### **Are they our priority?**

"No one can serve two masters" says Jesus, particularly if they are in conflict with one another. You will end up loving one and hating the other. This is how it is with God and our "stuff" and now it becomes clear that it includes our money - 'You cannot serve God and money'. This is the first time that Jesus has mentioned money. Some translations say "You cannot serve God and Mammon". Mammon is a biblical term which encompasses both money and material wealth. It even sounds like the name of a god and many medieval writers did misinterpret it as the name of an evil demon or god.

Notice that Jesus does not say that we cannot *love* God and money. He tells us that we cannot *serve* God and money. People love all sorts of things and often say so - they say that they love music, ice cream, nice shoes..... I doubt whether we do actually love some of those things, but even if we did that's OK. We can love both God and ice cream. And Jesus would have no problem with that, as long as we keep them in the right order. What we *can't* do is *serve* both God and ice cream...or shoes. If we think having nice shoes is the most important thing in life, that makes it impossible for us to serve God. Our "stuff" would have taken His place. Remember as far back as Exodus 20 vs 3 when the Israelites received the ten commandments from God and he said "You shall have no other gods before me". This law was not confined to the worship of idols and pagan gods, but encompassed anything that became more important than God.

Later on, in Matthew 19:16-22 we hear the story of the rich young man, who approaches Jesus to ask him how to inherit eternal life. He insists that he has kept the commandments and is wondering what else he might do.

Jesus says to him “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” The young man went away very sad because “he had great possessions.” Jesus didn’t say this to shame everyone who was listening into getting rid of everything they had, but he could see into the young man’s heart and knew that this was where his possessions were. They were his priority and he would not be able to give them up to serve God. So it is not just in our 21st century age of materialism that people had these difficulties. God must be the Lord whom we love and serve not our wealth and possessions.

### **Do we worry about them?**

If wealth and possessions become that important to us, then inevitably we will start to worry about them. Or rather worry about the possibility of being without them. Of course the events of this year have made worry and anxiety as much of a pandemic as coronavirus - it’s not just worry about there not being enough of things to go round, it is worry about our health, our loved ones, our jobs and the future in general. So this teaching is probably harder to take on board than usual at the moment. But right now it is even more important that we should have the inner resources to trust in our Father and know that He is good.

The few verses that follow are often read as a stand alone passage to illustrate Jesus teaching about worry in general, but he specifically links it to the previous verses by beginning - “*Therefore* I tell you...” So we know we are still talking about our stuff. The pandemic has exposed us worrying about what we have more than usual. We only have to consider the hoarding that went on earlier in the year. It seemed to come in waves didn’t it? First it was toilet rolls, then pasta, then flour, then eggs... It wasn’t that people *love* these things but they are some of the necessities of living and people became afraid that there wouldn’t be enough.

But Jesus says “do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink - what you will wear”. He goes on to give examples from nature - the birds and the flowers who are looked after, fed and clothed and look beautiful, without working and storing up things. God makes it all happen. Given that we are much more valuable to him than the birds or the flowers, isn’t even more likely that he will take care of us?

Well this might all sound a bit as if Jesus is a bit out of touch with real life. It’s all very well, but the birds and the lilies don’t have bills to pay, mortgages, families to feed and jobs to hold down. In fact it sounds a bit like he is just encouraging us to sit around being bone idle and expecting things to just happen.

### **Or are we just concerned?**

But of course it isn’t that people should sit around doing nothing. Scripture is full of examples of hard working, righteous people. It doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t eat nice food or that we should go around in dowdy clothes. Jesus knew that the creator God had filled the world with wonderful and beautiful things and wanted his followers to understand this and enjoy them and receive the wonder and beauty for themselves *without* other things intruding. What is more - he understood the difference between *worry* and *concern*.

Worry is fed by fear and leads to immobilisation. We are all aware of the ill effects of worry and anxiety - they damage our physical health, take over our thoughts and become all consuming. They make us less productive and affect how we relate to other people. And it follows that they erode our ability to trust in God, and to enjoy all of the things which he has in store for us.

Concern on the other hand is time well spent. It can involve such things as keeping informed and planning for tomorrow. It can be driven by a love for God as we lean on him for direction, knowing that He has all we need to meet our objectives and reach our goals. Asking God for guidance can alleviate worry and strengthen rather than erode our relationship with Him.

It is popularly believed that God tells us to “Fear Not..” 365 times in the Bible. I don’t actually think this is accurate, but it appears a lot of times.

It is the most common command in scripture. So surely this is a clear message that... we shouldn't worry! It doesn't mean bad things won't happen. Jesus acknowledges that. "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Jesus, who lived the ultimate simple life, had the skill of always living in the present and did not look ahead anxiously to what might happen. He understood eternity and trusted in the goodnesses of God his father. He taught us only a few verses previously, to pray that we be given our daily bread - not more bread than we need that we can store up and which will eventually go mouldy. He trusted in God to answer his prayer and provide him with enough.

### **What do we Treasure?**

So what do we treasure? I'm sure we would like the answer to be God - and the heavenly treasures he promises us.

But are we instead storing up worldly things and neglecting our heavenly inheritance? What exactly are we planning to do with the wealth we have? Do our money and possessions only serve as distractions which keeps us from focusing on God? Do we make them our priority above serving God? Either because we love them too much or are worried about losing them.

Jesus wants us to believe and trust in his father and the treasure he has in store for rather than material things, no matter how much we think we need them. And so he reassures us as we come near to the end of this passage. "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (treasures in heaven) and all these things (the things we think we need) will be given to you as well."

## **Emmanuel Church Text for 2020**

*"The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.  
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with  
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing."*

**Zephaniah 3:17**



## **Looking Upwards** (40 mins)

### *Bible Study*

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

**1.** How much de-cluttering have you done this year?

What has motivated you to do it - or not to do it?

What have you done with the things you de-cluttered?

**2.** How do you think your treasures/wealth/possessions might become tools in your hands that can be used for good?

**3.** What earthly things do you find distract you most from focusing on God?

**4.** In Matthew 19:16-22 we read the story of Jesus and the rich young man. If you had been an observer at the time, what do you think your reaction would have been? Could you identify with the young man?

**5.** What possessions do you worry most about being without? Does Jesus's advice in this passage help you with this?

**6.** How much do you ask God for guidance in your day to day life?

How does this make a difference to you - or how do you think it might if you did so more often?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## **Looking Inwards** (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



## **Looking Outwards** (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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