

August 18, 2002 by Steve Brandon



The Teaching of Jesus Christ - Material Possessions in Perspective

Matthew 6:19-24

1. Treasures (verses 19-21) - Things Break
2. Eyes (verses 22-23) - Things Blind
3. Masters (verse 24) - Things Bind

As you know, there are many people in this world who think that they are righteous because they attend a church service each week. They think that what they do during the week is irrelevant to their religion. They say, "As long as I perform my weekly duty to God, all is well. I have paid my dues to God and now I can live as I please." As a result, there may be great displays of righteousness on Sundays, but very little on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

For instance, I remember when I was studying at the Master's Seminary in Los Angeles that one of my classes was interrupted when a few policemen knocked on the door and entered the class room. They pointed to one of my classmates in the back corner of the room and motioned with their fingers for him to come with them. I remember sitting up front, while he was two rows behind me. He was studying the Bible to enter the ministry. He left with the policemen. We didn't know what happened to him. Our professor paused to pray for him and the situation, and then proceeded with the class. I found out later that he has been hand-cuffed and taken away in a squad car and taken to jail. He worked in the book store at the Seminary and was stealing books. His was a hypocrite, an actor. In the classroom he was presenting himself as a righteous man, who wanted to be a pastor. Yet, in his life apart from the classroom, he was a thief, who had stolen much property. He had deceived many of us. We had no idea of what was going on.

You cannot compartmentalize your relationship with God. Your whole life needs to be consistent with your profession. This isn't new to us. You know (as well as I do) that when Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30), that He wasn't only talking about what we should do on Sunday mornings when we gather at Rock Valley Bible Church. He was addressing our entire life. And yet, there are some who simply don't make this connection between Sunday and Monday.

I remember the story of William Grimshaw, a pastor in the 1700's. He suspected that some of his congregation who professed to be righteous people, were actually hypocrites. So, he thought that he would test them. He disguised himself as a poor man and then asked for help from someone in his congregation. He begged for financial help as well as a place to stay. He was treated with abuse. On another occasion, he went to a woman who was almost blind and began to tease her by gently touching her with a stick. She thought that he was one of the children in the neighborhood and began to threaten him and swear at him and lash out curses at him. These responses only confirmed in his mind the extent of their profession of religion. They put forth a show on Sunday (and probably when the pastor was in their presence), but on Monday, acted entirely differently. These people in this congregation were hypocrites. Their hypocrisy manifested itself outside the walls of the church. Oh, in church, they may have looked sincere, but outside of church, it was a different story.

True righteousness extends to all of life. True religion extends beyond your "religious" activities. In our study of the Sermon on the Mount, we have just completed a section in which Jesus describes our practical righteousness with respect to our religious activities (giving, praying, and fasting). This morning, Jesus will begin describing our practical righteousness as it relates to our **day-to-day living**. We will look this morning at verses 19-24, which addresses our day-to-day living as it relates to our attitude toward our money and our use of our physical resources. Next week we will look at our day-to-day living as it relates to our anxiety and worries. The week after than, we will look at our attitudes toward other people.

Matthew 6:19-24

(19) "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; (21) for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (22) The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. (23) But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! (24) No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

We see in this passage three contrasts that Jesus puts before us. There is the contrast of **treasures**. Jesus mentions earthly treasures in verse 19 and heavenly treasures in verse 20. There is the contrast of **eyes**. Jesus mentions the clear eye in verse 22 and the bad eye in verse 23. There is the contrast of **masters**. Jesus mentions them in verse 24: God and mammon. These three contrasts point out the difference between one who is practicing righteousness and one who is not practicing righteousness on a day to day basis. This will get us out of the walls of the church Or, in our case, a cafeteria). This addresses not just our giving to the church on Sunday, but our overall usage of our riches we posses. Our outline this morning will be formed by these contrasts:

1. Treasures (verses 19-21)
2. Eyes (verses 22-23)
3. Masters (verses 24)

Let's begin with ...

1. Treasures (verses 19-21)

Jesus is speaking about our treasures. We know what Jesus is talking about. Our treasures are the things that we have, the things that we own, and the things that we enjoy. Here are a few examples: our homes, our cars, our books, our computers, our boats, our campers, our bank accounts, our bicycles, our tools, our televisions, our outdoor grills, our "things."

These are the things that Jesus is speaking about. He says, "do not lay them up" (KJV, NKJV, NAS) or, as the NIV says, "do not store them up." In the Greek, there is a play on words. "Lay us" is the same word as "treasures." Literally, Jesus says, "Do not treasure up for yourselves treasures upon the earth." Or, "Do not store up for yourselves storehouses upon the earth."

If you ever have an opportunity, go to the library here in the school. There are several posters, which will give you a perspective of your physical possessions. The photographers went to various homes of people in different cultures. They asked them to take everything out of their house and place them in their front yard. Then, they took a picture of them in front of all of their earthly possessions. You will be shocked at how few possessions these people have. In America we have so much more than they have.

We have so many things that we need to buy things in which to keep our things! I know a man who has a car he doesn't want to sell, so he built a garage in which to keep the car. We are like the man in Luke 12:16-21, who found that he had so much grain, that he didn't know where to put it!

We have so many things that we need to buy things to protect our things! In the house we purchased, there is a security system (which we haven't yet figured out). This morning, for the first time, it was tripped somehow and began to ring with an alarm and woke our children. We build fences and purchase alarms and keep dogs to keep the thief from stealing our things.

We have so many things that they become a burden. Whenever I have made a major purchase in my life, my father has almost always said to me, "Steve, you have added to your burdens." Our possessions are burdens, which weigh us down. They demand our attention.

Notice that there are different types of treasures (or storehouses). Verse 19 speaks of the earthly kind of treasures. Verse 20 speaks of the heavenly kind of treasures. Here are a few examples of heavenly treasures:

- Eternal life (Matt. 19:21. The rich young ruler asked about eternal life in verse 16, Jesus spoke about treasures).
- A good foundation for the future (1 Tim. 6:19).
- "The fear of the LORD is his treasure." (Is. 33:6)
- An Inheritance, which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (1 Pet. 1:4).
- Heirs of the kingdom (James 2:5)
- Crown of glory (1 Pet. 5:4).
- Crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8)
- Glories of heaven
- Joy of heaven
- "An abiding possession." (Heb. 10:34)
- Heavenly, imperishable, and spiritual body (1 Cor. 15:40, 42, 44).
- We will be like Jesus (1 John 3:2), conformed to the image of Him (Rom. 8:29).

Suppose I gave you a choice today of earthly treasures or heavenly treasures. They are yours to have, you simply need to choose which you want. You take your pick. Which would you rather have? The earthly treasures or the heavenly treasures? It should be a no-brainer. When you can think about it for a little bit, you suddenly understand how great is the heavenly treasure and how temporary (and terrible) are the earthly treasures. Because earthly treasures won't last, but heavenly treasures last forever. This is Jesus' argument. He argues from the lasting value of things.

Look first at the earthly treasure (verse 19). The earthly treasures can be destroyed by nature, by moth or by rust.

1. Your wealth may be destroyed by moths!

Moths destroy garments. (Moths don't "eat" garments. Rather the liquid excreted by the larvae, which breaks down the wool in a garment). We don't think about garments as displaying wealth today. However, in the ancient world, garments were a symbol of wealth. For instance, Job speaks of the rich man, "who piles up silver like dust, and prepares garments as plentiful as the clay" (Job 27:16). When Isaac's servant sought to persuade Rebecca to come with him, he gave her "articles of silver and articles of gold, and garments" (Gen. 24:53). This is why Paul advised against the wearing of "costly garments" in the church service, because it was a display of wealth (1 Tim. 2:9). Jesus says that your wealth may be destroyed by moths!

2. Your wealth may be destroyed by rust.

The word here isn't really "rust" but "eating." It is describing any natural destructive process, like rust. We know what rust is about. I remember when I was but a child, we owned a Chevrolet Vega, which we used for a long time. It was an ugly car. Rust had eaten a hole in the floorboard, so that when you looked down at the floorboard, you could see the road passing by. Perhaps some of you have cars like that right now. I have a car right now that is being eaten away by rust along the back fender.

You leave things outside and the rain will destroy them. You leave things outside and the wind will destroy them. We know that nothing lasts forever.

3. Your wealth may be taken away from you by thieves.

Literally, Jesus says that the thief "digs under" and steals. In the ancient world, they built their houses upon the ground. Regardless of how strong the doors were, the thief could break into a house with a shovel, by digging under it with a shovel.

What you own today isn't safe. Things are stolen all the time. Your possessions may be stolen. Nothing you have and hoard is safe. It can be destroyed by nature (moths or rust). It can be stolen by other people.

Jesus' mention of these things is by no means exhaustive. You can lose your possessions by fire. You can lose your money by economic depression. You can lose the value of your money by inflation. You can lose your possessions by over-use (like the knees on your son's trousers). **Things break!**

But all of this is not true of your heavenly treasures. Verse 20 is almost an exact opposite of verse 19. Jesus says, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal." Moths don't destroy heavenly treasure. Rust doesn't destroy heavenly treasure. Thieves cannot break in and steal your heavenly treasure. Fire cannot consume heavenly treasure. Economic depression won't cause loss of heavenly treasure. Inflation cannot diminish value of heavenly treasure. You cannot over-use your heavenly treasure. **Heavenly treasure doesn't break.**

Jesus is basing his argument upon what lasts and what doesn't last (i.e. the quality of the treasure). He says, go after that which will last forever. We do this all the time. This week, I purchased a Swanson Speed Square. I had a choice between a metal one and a plastic one. I chose to spend a bit more money and purchase the metal one, which I expect will last a longer time. When you are considering the purchase of something, you don't purchase something if you know that it will break 5 minutes after you get home. Aren't you more inclined to purchase something if it comes with a lifetime guarantee? If you knew Enron was going to collapse, you wouldn't buy Enron stock. We expect our purchases to last. We often purchase those things that will last the longest.

But listen, everything upon the earth will ultimately fade away, even my Swanson Speed Square. Either your things will break or you will break! You cannot enjoy it forever. I have news for you. The man who dies a millionaire is no longer a millionaire. His money has gone to another to enjoy. The man who dies with a big Texas ranch, many cars, a private jet, and his own yacht, no longer owns these things. They go to another to enjoy.

Solomon uses the same argument in Ecclesiastes. He said, "I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; I made gardens and parks for myself, and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. Also, I collected for myself silver and gold, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men--many concubines" (Ecc. 2:4-8). Then, he concluded, "I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun" (Ecc. 2:18-19). A few chapters later, Solomon wrote, "There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, 'And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?'" (Ecc. 4:8).

Earthly treasures don't last and you won't enjoy them forever. My aim this morning is to teach you this and to convince you of this. When you do, you will desire with the poet, ...

'Let me hold lightly the things of this earth.
Transient treasures, what are they worth?
Moths can corrupt them, rust can decay,
All their bright beauty fades in a day.
(by Martha S. Nicholson)

Let's continue with verse 21, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." So, I ask you, church family, where is your treasure? Is your treasure here upon the earth? Or is your treasure awaiting you in heaven? Have you renounced the world, its sin and its lusts? Have you bowed the knee to Jesus Christ, in brokenness over your sin? By faith, have you laid hold of the promise of God in Christ Jesus of eternal life. I love the testimony of Moses given in the book to the Hebrews. "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin;

considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward" (Heb. 11:24-26). Have you laid hold of the reproach of Christ today? Have you considered the reproach of Christ as greater than all of the earthly treasures? If you have chosen to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, rather than the passing pleasures of sin, your treasure is in heaven and your perspective of your earthly possessions will be entirely different. When your treasure is in heaven, your heart is in heaven. When your heart is in heaven, you are no longer earthly-minded, but heavenly-minded. When you are heavenly-minded, you use your physical resources to advance God's glory, rather than your own pleasure.

Have you ever wished that you had a rich uncle who could come and provide you with everything you would ever need? Well, the Bible says that we have something far better than a rich uncle. The Broadway musical, "Annie" tells the story of a poor orphan girl, who is adopted by a rich man. She goes from owning nothing to owning everything her adopted father will give her. The Bible says that by faith, we become like little orphan Annie. By faith we may become children and heirs of God. The Bible says that by faith, we have been adopted as sons by the one who owns it all. People of faith have been adopted by the one who owns ...

- ... every beast of the forest.
- ... the cattle on a thousand hills.
- ... every bird of the mountains.
- ... everything that moves in the field.
- ... everything in the world (Ps. 50:10-12).

And you would set your affection upon the things of this world that you possess??? And you would seek to amass for yourselves earthly possessions for your own pleasure??? In many ways, this is a clear test. Have you treasured up for yourself treasures on earth or in heaven? Your use of possessions shows you where your heart really is. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." How do you use your possessions? What does it indicate about your heart.

The question is asked, "How do you treasure up for yourself treasures in heaven?" Basically, you can answer this question by saying that "Treasures in heaven are laid up when our treasures on earth are laid down."

Paul answered this question in 1 Timothy 6:17-19, as he expanded upon Jesus' words in Matthew 6. Paul said, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (verse 17). We aren't to fix our hope on riches, for they are uncertain. Riches aren't evil, God has given them to us to enjoy. Those who are rich are "to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share" (verse 18). This is how you store up for yourself treasures in heaven. (1) You are to "do good." (2) You are to be "rich in good works." (3) You are to be "generous" with the resources that God has given to you. (4) You are to be "ready to share" the things you have. In this way, those who are rich are "storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed" (verse 19). Does this describe you?

Day to day righteousness will be heavenly minded, reflecting upon our riches in Christ Jesus, which will deal accordingly with our possessions.

Let's move to the second contrast, ...
2. Eyes (verses 22-23)

Jesus said, "The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore 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 therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" (verses 22-23).

On the one hand, the imagery that Jesus uses in these verses isn't so difficult. He is basically using the imagery of light and darkness. Light is a good thing. Darkness is a bad thing. Yet, on the other hand, connecting these verses to the context is a bit more difficult. In verses 19-21, Jesus is speaking about physical things. In verse 24, Jesus is speaking about money. All of a sudden, here in verses 22-23, Jesus seems to jump metaphors to talk about something totally different -- light and darkness. I believe that the best way to understand these verses is to take them as relating the metaphor to our physical possessions.

I found many different translations describing the good eye. It was described with words like "clear, single, sound, good, healthy." The Greek word is 'aplouV (haplous). The root idea of this word has many different connotations, depending upon the context. It describes simple, straightforward obedience (Eph. 6:5; Col. 3:22) and devotion (2 Cor. 11:3). In other cases, it describes a liberality and graciousness (Rom. 12:8; 2 Cor. 8:2; 9:11,13). When we understand the scope of this word, we can see clearly how it can relate to our own physical possessions. It can easily describe a simple and generous perspective as we see the world clearly.

Let's dissect these words a little bit. He begins with a general statement. He follows up with three "if" statements, "if ... if ... if." Each of the three "if" statements explain the general statement. Jesus says, "The lamp of the body is the eye." This is His general statement. The eye is the member of our body, by which we can find our way. It is compared here to a lamp. Now, when you think of a lamp, don't think of an appliance which you plug in. Think, rather, of a portable light, which it was in Jesus' day. You might think about it as a flashlight.

If your flashlight is good, you will find your way. If your flashlight is dim, you will struggle in the way. If your flashlight is a flashdark (i.e. it doesn't turn on), you will not find your way. Jesus is teaching that if you have a good, clear, healthy eye, your whole body will be able to find its way, like a good flashlight. But if you have a bad, dark, evil eye, your whole body will not find your way, like a broken flashlight. If your light is darkness. You are filled with darkness. You have no light in you. Jesus has just been addressing the issue of having a proper spiritual perspective on your treasures. I think here that Jesus is simply exhorting us to have a proper spiritual vision toward our physical and financial resources as well. In other words, you need to see clearly the spiritual realities that await you. **You need spiritual vision.**

Just as a soldier in the army can take out his night vision goggles and see things which cannot be seen with the naked eye, so also do we

have to look, "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18). I spoke earlier of the man who built bigger barns to store His abundance of grain. After they were built, he planned say, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry." But God said to him, "You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?" Jesus commented, "So is the man who lays up treasures for himself and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:19-21). The man that Jesus described failed in that he didn't have good spiritual vision.

When the eye is clear, you will have spiritual vision and you will hold loosely to your possessions. I read earlier from a poem. I want to continue ...

Let me hold lightly the things of this earth.
Transient treasures, what are they worth?
Moths can corrupt them, rust can decay,
All their bright beauty fades in a day.
Let me hold lightly temporal things,
I who am deathless, I who wear wings.
Let me hold fast, Lord, things of the skies,
Quicken my vision, open my eyes.
Show me Thy riches, glory and grace,
Boundless as time is, endless as space.
Let me hold lightly things that are mine
Lord, Thou dost give me all that is Thine'.
(by Martha S. Nicholson)

This poem describes Jesus' words exactly. Martha Nicholson asked that God would "quicken my vision, open my eyes." This is a prayer for spiritual vision. When the eye is clear, you will have spiritual vision. Your grip on your possessions will be loose. You will have a long-term view of your possessions, realizing that you cannot keep them forever, so you won't store them up. Rather, you will invest them for the kingdom and you will obtain your heavenly treasure. Do you have a long-term view of your possessions?

At this point, I would like to address those of you who struggle financially with debt. Most often, people are in debt, because they don't have a long-term view of their possessions. Rather than waiting to purchase something when you have the money, the passion of possession and enjoyment right now, will compel you to make a purchase right now using credit. You want it now and cannot wait. So, you go into debt. If this is you, you need to take Jesus' statements here very seriously. Often, those who go into debt don't even have a view to wait for a few months to purchase what they want. Jesus tells us to take a long-term view of our possessions, not just for the next year, but for the next 20 years, the next 40 years, the next 60 years. If you are in debt due to impulsive spending today, it is merely a warning sign, that you have difficulty in comprehending the delayed satisfaction to which Jesus calls us.

Have you treasured up for yourself treasures in heaven, which we will enjoy in the future? Or have you treasured up for yourself treasures on earth, where you can enjoy it now! Are you using the things that God has given to you to invest in eternity? Or, do you spend your wages for that which does not satisfy? (Is. 55:2). Solomon said, "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance with its income" (Ecc. 5:10). You need to have the vision to see that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

Suppose a very rich man came to you one day and gave you \$100,000. He told you that the \$100,000 was yours to use as you wanted. But he also told you that He had \$10 million in the bank, which he was willing to give to you, provided you met one condition: to spend all of your \$100,000 to advance God's kingdom. If at the end of your year, you did that, the \$10 million would be yours. Would you find it difficult to spend your \$100,000? Why not? Because your heart would be upon the \$10 million in the bank, which awaited you. You would clearly see the reality, which is exactly what Jesus said in verse 21, "where you treasure is, there will your heart be also."

My aim this morning, is to urge you to realize the glories of the treasure that awaits those who believe in Jesus. Think with me, church family, of the inheritance which is laid up for those who have trusted in Jesus. God's promise to us is that we will be with Jesus. God's promise to us is that we will be like Jesus. Your every need will be met. You will be satisfied with everything. You will no longer suffer any disappointment. It's all yours if you lay down the life that God has given to you. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:24-26). It's all yours if repent from your sin and trust in Jesus to forgive all of your unrighteousness. In some measure, God gives us our life to test us of our love for Him. Your life is like the \$100,000 gift. Will you keep it or give it away? Remember, however, that you aren't going to earn your way into heaven, any more than you earned the \$10 million in the bank through doing what you are told.

When our heart is fixed upon heaven and the crown of life we will receive from Him, "the things on earth grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." Our spiritual vision begins to dominate our understanding of reality. Paul said, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory" (Col. 3:2-4). Notice how Paul connects our spiritual vision ("setting our mind on the things above") with our perspective of earthly things ("not on the things that are on the earth"). It all culminates with our heavenly treasure being consummated when Christ is "revealed with Him in glory."

This is Jesus' message. You need spiritual vision. But **things on the earth blind us**. Earthly possessions are like bright lights around us that prevent us from seeing beyond them. Have you ever tried to see something that is just beyond a glare on a car? It is difficult, because the car glare is so blinding. So are earthly possessions.

Finally, let's focus our attention upon the last contrast that Jesus gives us. It is found in verse 24.

3. Masters (verse 24)

Things break (verses 19-21). Things blind (verses 22-23). Things bind (verse 24).

Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (verse 24). This statement is strong and absolute. There is no wiggle-room in this statement. You cannot be double-minded about these things. You either serve the Lord Jesus Christ or you serve your material possessions. About a year and half ago I preached on 1 John 2:15, which says the same thing Jesus said, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." You cannot lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven AND treasures upon the earth. It is one or the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (which means money).

We might be a little confused by this statement, because we often tend to equate "master" with "employer." At times this is appropriate. For instance, in several instances, Paul told slaves to be obedient to their masters (Eph. 6:5-8; Col. 3:22-25). Today, this ought to be applied to our employer/employee relationship. However, we then can become confused with Jesus' absolute statement about the impossibility of two masters. We think, "I can have two employers! I know plenty of people who have two jobs. It works out great for them." The problem with that reasoning is that Jesus isn't talking about employers for his illustration. Rather, Jesus is talking about masters and slaves. A slave had only one owner, not two. Slavery means full-time service.

Jesus told us that you can have one or the other. You can have God or you can have money. You cannot have both. In other places Jesus said much the same thing. He said, "No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). I quoted Jesus' words earlier, "For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25). When one disciple asked permission to bury his father, Jesus rebuked him and said, "Follow Me; and allow the dead to bury their own dead." Jesus calls us to lose our lives, that we may gain our lives.

In the Bible, there are **good examples** of those who have done this. The apostle Paul said, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but manure in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). The early Christians gave up claim to this world. The writer to the Hebrews affirms they "accepted joyfully the seizure of their property, knowing that they would have for themselves a better possession and an abiding one" (Heb. 10:34). Job did this. He "delivered the poor who cried for help, and the orphan who had no helper. ... I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy and I investigated the case which I did not know" (Job 29:12, 15, 16).

We also see some **bad examples** in the Bible as well. We are told that a man named Demas, "loved this present world" and deserted the apostle Paul in prison. There have been many who have loved their money "and have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang" (1 Tim. 6:10). The rich young ruler preferred the treasures on earth, rather than the treasure in heaven (Matt. 19:21-22). Jesus said that "it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:23).

The reason it is difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven is because the more you have, the less you think of your future, because you are comfortable today. As many of you know, my wife and I enjoyed a cruise last week during our vacation. We had a great time. Knowing that I was going to preach on materialism today, I was sifting my entire cruise experience through the grid of Jesus' words. I was really struck with how pleasurable things were on the cruise. Every earthly desire was satisfied. There was entertainment. There was fancy food. There was atmosphere. In this environment there is little need to long for something better, because of the niceties of the moment.

I also reflected upon a story that I heard John MacArthur tell one time. A few years ago he went to Russia to give a conference for pastors, to help them shepherd their churches better. He said that for several days, he spoke about the church and how Christ purchased it. He spoke of how precious it is in the eyes of God and how important it is to be led by godly men. Yet, during this entire time, he was receiving notes on pieces of paper that were being passed up to the front. They contained questions for him. He said that many of these said, "When will you get to the good stuff?" John MacArthur said that he was somewhat confused. What could be better than the great truths he was presenting about the church. Then, someone explained to him that these pastors were talking about heaven when they used the term "good stuff." Their circumstances were so dismal, that their hearts were focussed upon heaven! Yet, for the rich man, the nice things of the earth tend to dull one's focus upon the glories of the world to come.

The story is told of several Americans who wanted to visit a godly, Christian missionary. They visited his home and found that it was very modest. It contained a stove, a cot, a chair and a table. One of the visiting Americans asked, "Where is your furniture?" To which the old missionary replied, "Where is **your** furniture?" The American said simply, "I'm travelling. I don't carry my furniture when I travel." The missionary replied, "so am I." Church family, we are aliens and strangers in this world (1 Pet. 2:11). The old traditional hymn says it this way, ...

This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing thru
My treasures and my hopes are all beyond the blue;
Where many Christian children have gone on before,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

So, I ask you the obvious question this morning, "Who are you serving?" I'm not asking about right now. Right now, you are seated here, seeming to serve God. I'm asking you about tomorrow and the next day. I'm asking you about your day-to-day activities. Is it obvious that Jesus is your master, to whom you owe all? Do your actions demonstrate it? Do your words demonstrate it? Or is it obvious that the almighty

dollar is your master? Do you slave at work to obtain it? Do you speak about how you will spend it? I'm not asking you if you have "nice things." I'm asking whether or not "nice things have you."

We have the opportunity now to participate in the Lord's Supper. As we do so, it is a time of self-evaluation. Paul told the Corinthians, "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly" (1 Cor. 11:27-29). I would ask you to spend some time right now examining yourself. Is Jesus your Lord? Is money your Lord?

It is obvious who you are serving? John wrote, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are **obvious**: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother?" (1 John 3:10). Have you cried out to God for mercy and seen Him transform your life to practice righteousness and give you an unexplained love for your brother?

1. Perhaps money is your Lord. Perhaps you are living for your next purchase. If so, I ask you not to participate in the Lord's Supper this morning. Simply let the plate go by as it passes by you. "He who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly" (1 Cor. 11:29).
2. Perhaps today is the day when you would bow your knee before the Father and confess your sins and embrace the redemption that is in Jesus Christ for those who believe. If that is your desire, cry to Him for mercy and join us in celebrating the Lord's death with us.
3. If Jesus is your Lord and Savior, use this time to examine your life. See if there are areas of worldliness in your life for which you need to confess and make right with the Lord. Do this before you participate this morning. Then celebrate the Lord's supper as you "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 18, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
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