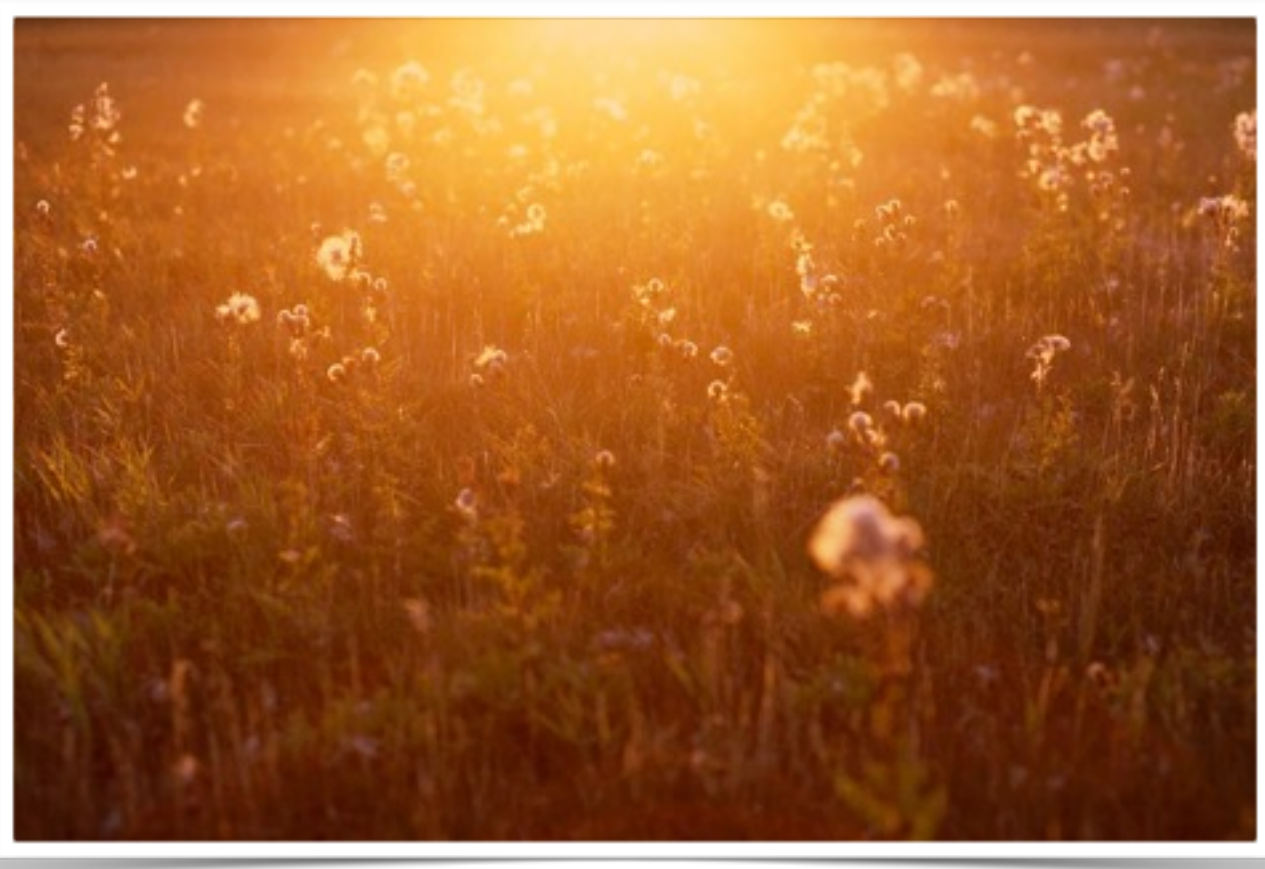


Sermon Series: *Jesus Said what?*



# Lay Up for Yourself Treasures In Heaven

Learning to Seek an Eternal Reward

## **Matthew 6:19-24 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>22</sup> *"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"*

<sup>24</sup> *"No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money."*

## Prayer

Father, reveal to us exactly who it is or what it is that we treasure most. Let the light of your word and the work of your Spirit expose to us where our treasure is and where our hearts are. If they are not completely with you, then please change our hearts and causes us to treasure You above all other things and persons. May we love you above all others. May we be devoted to you above all others. May you be our deepest devotion and truest treasure. Through Christ I pray, Amen.

## Introduction

Human behavior is largely determined by a desire for reward. We make most of our choices based upon the belief that this or that action or behavior will bring us some good. The promise of reward is a powerful motivator. Every parent know this. Every employer knows this. Every teacher knows this. Parents establish good habits in their children by rewarding the good behavior they desire to promote. Employers promise a bonus as a reward for certain levels of production. In kindergarten we are motivated to learn things so we will get a star or a sticker beside our name on the poster board over the teacher's desk.

This truth continues to play out throughout our lives. We choose to invest in friendships which we believe will be most rewarding. We choose schools which we think will be most beneficial for our lives. We marry the one whom we believe to be the most rewarding life-long mate. We strive to find the job which we think will be most pleasing to us. Most, if not all, of what we do is guided by our desire to experience and to enjoy that which is most rewarding.

Sometimes we even behave irrationally in order to receive a reward. For example, the Los Angeles Times two days ago reported that in the 10 weeks prior to the January 13th drawing for the \$1.5 billion Powerball Jackpot, Californians spent more than they did in the previous fiscal year. Between Nov. 7 and Jan. 13, the residents of California spent \$386 million dollars buying Power Ball tickets. Sales for the entire 2014-15 fiscal year totaled \$372 million.<sup>1</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Source: <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-powerball-frenzy-sales-budget-reached-20160128-story.html> accessed 30 Jan 2016.

The New York Times reported that the odds of winning that Power Ball Jackpot were one in 292 million.<sup>2</sup> That's almost the same odds as writing the name of every person in U.S. on a piece of paper, putting them in a large hat, and then expecting to draw out your own name on the first draw. That is of course, an unrealistic expectation, but *the promise of reward was so great that millions of Americans paid lots of money to play the game*. We act—albeit sometimes irrationally—in accord with that which we believe will bring us the greatest reward.

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), the brilliant French mathematician, physicist, inventor<sup>3</sup> and Christian philosopher, said it this way;

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Pascal died very young. He was only 39 years old. He was a Christian and a student of the human heart. It was Pascal who first verbalized the notion, that many of us refer to today as a the idea that there is a God-shaped void within us, a space within the human soul which only God can fill and satisfy.

Pascal believed that the greatest reward we seek is happiness and so we fill our lives with tangible things as we strive to satisfy an intangible desire. Yet he observed that despite the fact that people accumulate more and more possessions, yet those possessions are unable to provide the satisfaction, the fulfillment, the contentment, and the happiness for which we yearn.



What is it then that this desire [for happiness] and this inability [to find it] proclaim to us, but that there was once in man a true happiness of which there now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present? But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/13/us/powerball-odds.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/13/us/powerball-odds.html?_r=0) accessed 30 Jan 2016.

<sup>3</sup> At the age of 19 he invented the first mechanical calculator.

<sup>4</sup> Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* #425, available at [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18269/18269-h/18269-h.htm#SECTION\\_VII](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/18269/18269-h/18269-h.htm#SECTION_VII) accessed 30 Jan 2016.

Pascal believed that we were created to find our happiness in God himself. There once was a time when man was happily filled with all the goodness of God. This was the wonderful time of sweet communion that man enjoyed with God in the Garden of Eden. It was a time of soul satisfying friendship and happiness.

But then sin entered Paradise through Adam's disobedience and the result was that man was forever separated from God. This separation left a hole in the soul of man. Pascal believed that the hole in the human soul is only repaired when a person returns to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Pascal believed that God himself is the greatest reward to be found in this life.

To live in an intimate, personal relationship with God is the greatest reward and brings the greatest happiness we will ever experience. And yet many of us exhaust ourselves seeking reward, seeking happiness in other things and other relationships apart from God. We seek from them what they inherently are unable to provide.

This is why Jesus' words in Matthew 6:19-24 are so striking. I too believe that God created us to enjoy a relational happiness and joy that is found only with Him. And here in these verses, Jesus invites us, nay, commands us, to make God our highest treasure and greatest reward. Jesus says in verse 20,

*"Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." (6:20)*

*"No one can serve two masters..." (6:24)*

*"You cannot serve God and money." (6:24)*

He does not say that seeking reward is wrong. He says that seeking and *earthly* reward is wrong. He does not command us to stop seeking reward. He commands us to stop seeking an *temporal* reward. Treasure seeking is not sinful, so long as the hunt leads to you the Father in heaven.

## Understanding the Context

Before we move directly to the text, let's get a handle on the context. We need to follow Jesus' train of thought that leads up to these words. The idea of reward is the dominate theme leading up to these words (see 6:1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 16, & 18).

Jesus spoke these words in what we know as The Sermon on the Mount, which spans Matthew chapters 5-7. In this sermon, Jesus "deals with the character, duties, attitudes, and the danger

of the Christian disciple.”<sup>5</sup> His primary concern is rightly describing what true discipleship looks like. His aim is obedience from the heart and an undivided devotion to God the Father.

He states plainly that the purpose of God’s people in the world is to do good works in such a way that brings glory to God the Father (Mt 5:16). The good deeds of God’s people are to be seen (Mt 5:14) by the world and they are to bring about changes in the world that results in greater good (5:13-15).

Jesus also then clarifies what the true righteousness of God looks like. He makes clear that the righteousness that God demands for those who would dwell with him in heaven is a perfect righteousness (5:20, 46). Jesus then destroys all hope that one can achieve that righteousness through their own effort in doing good deeds. He does this by illustrating their failure to keep God’s law concerning anger, (5:21-16), lust (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), oaths (5:33-37), retaliation (5:38-42), and love for enemies (5:43-48).

## Seek A Reward From Your Father In Heaven

Beginning with chapter 6, Jesus takes it one step further by teaching that ***the disciple who will enter the kingdom of heaven is one who seeks an eternal reward rather than a temporal reward***. The person who gets into heaven is the one who desires to please God more than their man.

(Matthew 6:1 ESV)

<sup>1</sup> *“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.*

Jesus introduces the idea of reward.<sup>6</sup> Jesus is warning his disciples here about how to avoid losing reward in heaven. He makes a distinction between those who live to please men and those who live to please God the Father. Both groups of people do all the same religious activities. The key difference is that some settle for a temporal reward, while others seek an eternal reward. Some seek to please their peers while others seek to please their heavenly Father.

Jesus illustrates the difference between these two groups through the use of money (6:2-4), the exercise of prayer (6:5-15), and fasting (6:16-28). The first group of people—who are spiritual pretenders—give their money, pray, and fast ***in order to be seen and praised by others***. Jesus says, *“Truly I say to you, they have received their reward”* (6:2, 5, 16). The reward is that they are well thought of by their peers and they are praised by their peers, but that’s it. They have only an earthly reward. There is no heavenly reward. God the Father will not reward or praise those people who are religious pretenders and only practice religion to impress their peers.

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<sup>5</sup> R.T. France, *Matthew*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 111.

<sup>6</sup> He has already mentioned ‘reward’ in Mt 5:12 & 5:46.

Jesus then commands those who have ears to hear to avoid doing those things with the goal of being seen by man. He advises them instead to live their lives aimed at pleasing God the Father. Those who truly desire to please the Father are to give their money in secret, pray in secret, and fast in secret so that their heavenly Father, who sees everything that happens in secret, will reward them.

This is the line of thinking that leads to the next words that Jesus spoke.

## Seek A Better Treasure (v.19-21)

**Jesus explains that an eternal treasure is far better than an temporary treasure.** He states this truth both negatively and positively.

### **Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)**

*<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

**Jesus commands his disciples to seek a better treasure.** He commands his followers to stop striving for treasure that fades, corrodes, or that can be taken away. Instead, he commands us to seek an eternal treasure that *never* fades, corrodes, or can be taken away. Notice what the problem is. The problem is not *that* we seek treasure. The problem is that we seek the wrong *kind* of treasure.

The problem is not that it's wrong to seek treasure for ourselves. The problem is settling for a temporal treasure when eternal treasure is offered us. Accepting the treasure of the world and rejecting the treasure of God is like settling for week-old, moldy leftovers from the back of the refrigerator when a gourmet chef stands before you offering to prepare the freshest, best-tasting supper you could imagine. C.S. Lewis put it this way,

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.<sup>7</sup>

## What Treasures Shall We Lay Up?

What are these treasures that we are to lay up? In the previous portion of the chapter Jesus had mentioned three things that God will reward, financial generosity, prayer, and fasting.

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<sup>7</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001), 26.

Obviously this is not an exhaustive list. Jesus is saying that when a person is obedient to the revealed will of God then every act of obedience will carry the reward of the Father's approval in heaven.

And if you're worried that obeying him for the sake of receiving a reward he has promised is somehow poor motivation, Jesus says,

**Matthew 6:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

If the treasure you desire most is the approval of God the Father, then your heart will be in the right place. If your treasure is in heaven, then your heart will be in heaven. If your greatest treasure in all the world is pleasing God the Father, then there is nothing at all wrong with desiring to obey him in order to receive from him the very blessings that he himself has promised to give those who walk in his ways.

God is not offended when his children seek from him the reward that he himself has promised to give them. That's what faith is. Faith is the belief that it is better for you to obey God and please him than disobey him and displease him. This is why the writer of Hebrews said,

**(Hebrews 11:6 ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

God yearns for us to draw near him and this is why he promises reward to those who will trust his words and receive his invitation. **God himself is the reward he gives.** The promised rewards are intended *to draw us near to himself* so that we might experience the sweetness of his company.

It is our needs that compel us toward him in order that *our yearnings would be satisfied in him*. When we draw near him, then we discover that he can satisfy all our needs and then he becomes our greatest treasure. No one who truly comes to him and experiences the joy of his presence will ever be content to turn away and only seek his gifts rather than the Giver of those gifts. It is God himself who says,

**(Psalms 81:10 ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> *I am the Lord your God,  
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.  
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.*

We honor him when we run to him to have all our desires satisfied by him. We dishonor him when we turn away from him and think that we can satisfy ourselves. God is not offended when we look to him in order to have our needs meet. However, he is offended when we look away



from him and begin to look at the temporal treasure of this world in order to have our needs met. This is why Jesus warns that we should be careful what we watch.

## Be Careful What You Watch (v.22-23)

Jesus moves from the heart to the eyes as he moves from v.21 to v.22.

### **Matthew 6:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> *"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!"*

There's a connection between what we treasure in our hearts and what we see with our eyes? The connection is that we are prone to treasure in our hearts what we see with our eyes. That which we set before our eyes tends to become that which we treasure in our hearts. Every advertising agency in the world knows this and this is why they spend millions of dollars on setting before our eyes the things which they want us to treasure. It is for this reason that God commanded Israel to make visual reminders of their relationship with him.

### **(Numbers 15:39 ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> *And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the Lord, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to whore after.*

Our hearts tend worship and treasure what we see with our eyes.<sup>8</sup> This is why we must be careful what we watch. Jesus says, **the eye is the lamp of the body**. A lamp helps illuminate your path so you keep moving forward. The eye goes after what it sees. The whole body goes where they eyes are looking. This means that a person's entire course of life can be directed by that to which the eyes are most drawn. Wherever you're looking, that's where you're going.

If the eyes are filled up with a constant looking toward things that are filled with light and goodness, then that person's life will be filled with goodness and light. However, if the eyes are filled with dark and evil things, then that person's life will be filled with darkness and evil. If the eyes only gaze upon the good, then good will fill one's life. But if the eyes only gaze upon what is evil, then darkness will fill one's life.

And if darkness fills and dominates one's life, then oh how dark with that life be?

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<sup>8</sup> Job 31:7.



## Whose Your Master? (v.24)

Our lives cannot be filled with both light and darkness. We have been created to serve only one master. The question is who will that master be?

### **Matthew 6:24 (ESV)**

<sup>24</sup> *"No one can serve two masters, for 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 God and money."*

Jesus says we can only serve one master. He then narrows the choice of possible masters down to two, God and money. The word 'money' translates the Greek word *mammon*, which comes from an Aramaic word that means "wealth, property. The root in both Aramaic and Hebrew (*ʾmn*) indicates that in which one has confidence."<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the word 'possessions' better gets at the meaning.

Our confidence can only rest in one master. Either we will place our confidence in God or in possessions. We can only truly treasure one master and it will either be God or it will be wealth. Either we will live our lives for a heavenly reward or an earthly reward. Either we will seek to please God or we will seek to please man. Either we will spend our lives laying up treasure on earth or we will spend our lives laying up treasure in heaven. Which is the better treasure? Who is the better master?

Isn't not a sin to have possessions or to be wealthy, it's only a problem when that becomes your master.

Who is the master of your life? Do you strive more to please your peers and impress your neighbors or God the Father?

Are your actions determined more by laying up the treasures on earth or by laying up treasure in heaven?

Why would we settle for temporary treasures that fade away, fall apart, and can be lost when eternal treasure that never fades, never falls apart, and cannot be lost is held out before us?

Which reward is the better reward?

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<sup>9</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelinein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 178.