

THE HEART'S AMBITION - THE TRUE MEASURING STICK OF A DISCIPLE - Matthew 6:19-34

The radical nature of true discipleship is punched out crisply in these verses. Jesus teaches that a ***person is measured by what he loves, not by his doctrinal statement***. At the core of Jesus' teaching in these verses is the thought that ***it is not enough for the disciple to merely DO some different things. He must LOVE different things***.

Listen to Jesus teach about ***two treasures*** (19-21 - earthly and heavenly), ***two conditions*** (22-23 - light and darkness), ***two masters*** (24 - God and mammon), and ***two preoccupations*** (25-34 - ourselves and God's Kingdom).

In each case Jesus offers only ***two options***. This is to force the disciple into a position of ***choice***. A fork in the road means you must go one way or the other. Jesus calls each follower to ***carefully pick the direction of his life by establishing the motivation of his heart***. We are not to just drift with the pack. To make the matter clear He uses ***three illustrations: treasures*** (19-21), ***vision*** (22-23), and ***masters*** (24).

After using these three illustrations, Jesus outlines the ***painful result of following blind and misleading ambitions*** (25-34). As always, we do not just break a command of God when we follow the natural inclinations of our hearts. ***We rob our lives of the poise and peace and joy they were created to contain***.

- 1) **OUR LIFE'S TREASURES** - 6:19-21 - "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on 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 and steal. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Jesus tells us to think about ***durability***. Our earthly treasures will last about as long as cloth in a rat's nest. Jesus cautions us against ***anchoring our eternal lives to temporary goods***. We were not designed for this. Also, he warns that these material goods ***have a tighter hold on all of our lives than we imagine***. Certainly there is nothing wrong with material goods in themselves, but Jesus warns that material concerns ***make our minds and hearts earthbound***. They shrink our capacity for God by drawing our hearts ***downward*** and ***inward***.

Notice the emphasis in the words, "***For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also***." We almost always misread Jesus' intent in those words. Jesus ***isn't*** saying it's all right to have large amounts of material goods, just so long as our heart is in the right place. Almost ***all*** Christians read those words that way. Jesus is saying your heart can't ***possibly*** be right if you are amassing material treasure. That's very different. ***Hearts follow material treasures***. Always. It can never be otherwise. Don't take the bite out of those striking words. Jesus ***isn't*** saying, "Try not to become too attached to material goods." He's saying, "***You must choose between material goods and me!***" That's quite a different matter.

There is something else very striking in these words about treasure. The only way to fight the downward pull of material possessions is to lay up treasure in heaven. Purity of heart isn't just a matter of trying not to become too attached to our goods. A negative approach to fighting materialism is futile and useless. You and I cannot guard our hearts apart from sacrificial giving to Christ's kingdom. Giving is for ***us***. Giving is how we ***keep our wants in check***.

- 2) **OUR LIFE'S VISION** - 6:22-23 - "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, [23] 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!"

What do we value more than our sight? The eye lets light into the whole body. Clear vision enables us to function. It keeps us from stumbling. Jesus uses this illustration of the eye to further teach on the ambition of our hearts. ***Intent is everything in the disciple's life***. What do you have your "sight" set on? What are you aiming for? Jesus says our problem is not that we don't try to love God. Rather, we love God ***along*** with a host of other things. Our love for God is a ***distracted*** love. This issue was so important to Jesus He addressed it again in **Matthew 13:22** - "***As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful***."

What darkens life the most? Jesus says life becomes dark and blind ***internally*** before it's corrupted ***externally***. Life is darkened by ***earthbound ambitions*** - 23 - "***...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!”

Jesus is working back to the concept of being *“pure in heart”* (5:8). *Impurity* of heart isn’t firstly a matter of sexual immorality or violence. Its primary manifestation is a *multiplicity of gods*. Only the pure in heart will see God. Our passion for God must not become diluted with either the *passing of time* or the *accumulation of goods*. See also Ephesians 4:17-20 - “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. [20] But that is not the way you learned Christ!”

- 3) OUR LIFE'S MASTERS - 6:24 - “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.”

This is Jesus' closing argument - and it's very appropriate. Jesus prepares His sermon for those who want to argue with Him in their hearts. *We all think we can handle the material enticements of life with a fair amount of maturity*. Other people might be tripped up by false ambitions but we can handle things quite nicely, thank-you. We'll simply make it a matter of prayer. Jesus' closing illustration refutes this. Which ever way we go - Jesus or wealth - we will be mastered by our loves. The opposite of leaving either master isn't absolute freedom. It's domination by the other. You've got to serve somebody. Nobody can walk the un-mastered middle ground. Nobody.

This idea of *masters* carried more weight in Jesus' day. Today, a person can work for two different *employers* if he has the time. But in Jesus' day, *no slave could ever work for two masters*. He would be *totally* owned by one or the other, and that is Jesus' point. We must never make His lordship any smaller than this. His rule is joyous, yes, and liberating too. But only when it is absolute and unrestricted. Jesus will not redeem half a life. He *doesn't* just forgive sins. He takes the whole person, and the *first* thing He claims is my *ambitions*.

- 4) THE CAUSE OF OUR TROUBLES - 6:25-34 - “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? [26] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? [27] And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? [28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, [29] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. [30] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31] Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32] For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. [33] But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. [34] "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”

These are truly profound and revealing words. *Fear* is what fuels *greed*. To fight blind ambition you must first confront the unspoken fear that feeds it. Fear is what keeps us from a whole-hearted commitment to Jesus. *If I make His Kingdom the central focus and priority of my life, who will look after me and my family?* We are automatically *“anxious”* of these things.

Certainly a person must work, plan, think, and save for the needs of his household. The Bible clearly teaches this. But I must also *trust that I can safely put God first, knowing that He will take care to honor His Word even in the material concerns of life*.

The message of Jesus in these closing verses is that God is the one who tells me to put Him first. He is the one who keeps track of the details of His created world (He even knows about little creatures like birds and flowers). Surely, if I'm seeking to honor Him, He will give His Fatherly care to the daily concerns of my life. I can trust Him with that. I'm free to lay up treasure in heaven. I am free to make the joyous discovery of an unfettered life. Once the ambitions are renewed freedom reigns. Not wanting something is as good as possessing it.