

Matthew 6:19-34

There are at least three reasons why I desired to teach about possessing money, managing it and the giving of it. I believe over these next two Sundays you will find reasons why you will be glad that I am speaking about money and I hope you will be encouraged. The purpose is to seek understanding of what Christ taught and how it effects us when we are faithful to what He taught. This teaching is meant to help us bring our attitude and actions into agreement with Christ and this will bring blessings into our lives and bless others in His name.

Blessings of Good Company

The first reason for giving is that it puts one in good company, namely, with our Lord Jesus. Jesus had a lot to say about money. The author of "*The Treasure Principle*," Randy Alcorn calculated that, "15 percent of everything Christ said relates to this topic — more than his teachings on heaven and hell combined." There are two topics in Scripture that I find when used and lived as the Bible teaches are great blessings in a person's life and when done the world's way they bring difficulty and pain into a person's life – these two, are sex and money. Jesus spoke of these two topics a great deal in the Bible. Follow me as we travel quickly through the scriptures for some examples of what Jesus had to say about money. These will help lay the foundation for this morning and next Sunday.

Jesus said -

“You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” (Mark 10:21)

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God... But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” (Luke 6:20, 24)

“Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33)

“How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.” (Luke 18:24-25)

“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” (Luke 12:15)

“Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Luke 12:33-34)

“Zacchaeus ... said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor’ ... And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house.’” (Luke 19:8-9)

“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” (Matthew 13:44)

“Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, ‘Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them.’” (Luke 21:1-3)

“But God said to *the man who built even bigger barns*, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ ²¹ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:20-21)

Over and over Jesus is relentless in His radical call to a wartime lifestyle as believers battle against the present darkness of this world. Jesus calls believers to a liberality of lifestyle of giving – *remember the widow put in all she had!* One time Jesus refers to the Old Testament minimum of giving a tenth of your income, endorses it, and then calls for a way of looking at life and money in a more radical way than the mere tithe of 10%. Jesus said, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you **tithe** mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” (Matthew 23:23) We are to give for justice and mercy and faithfulness out of a heart that is thankful to the God who has saved us. We are to give sacrificially, as God gave His son sacrificially that we might have salvation.

Giving of your first fruits and tithing consistently and with liberality is exactly what Christians are called to live. As I have said, speaking of sacrificial tithing and giving places us in the company of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, who spoke of giving a great deal and of its importance in the lifestyle of a believer. We can also look to the history of the early church; “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... All who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.” (Acts 2:42, 45) The early church was a community that cared about the teaching of Christ and cared for others and gave sacrificially. Paul also wrote of the giving by churches sacrificially that the ministry of God could move forward, “We want you to know, brothers, about

the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, ² for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.” (2 Corinthians 8:1-2) The churches gave sacrificially to meet the needs of evangelism and missions. Paul continued a little further on in his letter to the Corinthians, saying, “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹ As it is written, (*in Psalm 112:9*) ‘He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.’” (2 Corinthians 9:7-9) We give so that every good work of the kingdom will flourish. The brother of Jesus, the Apostle James wrote, “For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.” (James 1:11) The days of our lives are numbered and material wealth will not follow us to heaven, it is meant to bless lives – ours and others.

Speaking of money and tithing is a difficult thing, but it places us in the good company of Christ and the Apostles. As we study giving as a fundamental part of a Christians lifestyle I will work to stay true to the scriptures and what our Lord taught.

Blessings Released

A second reason for giving is, if we as a church, and indeed if the entire Christian movement, were gripped by the radical spiritual life and open-handed liberality that Jesus taught we would taste the freedom from fear and greed that Jesus bought with His own blood. Living a life of freely giving would create an avalanche of released blessings and financial means for His ministry! O, my beloved, what a

responsibility we rich Americans have in this world of suffering and need. As Jesus so pointedly said, “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required.” (Luke 12:48) Even though Jesus said this, many Christians fail to live as He instructed.

The average evangelical Christian gives about 1.2% of their income in tithe or roughly \$600 to \$700 per year. Nearly one-quarter of all born-again Christians (23%) gave no money to the church according to the Barna Research Group. The two biggest reasons are; they are carrying too much debt and or because of their lack of commitment to live the Christian lifestyle in every aspect. Can you imagine the blessings God would release if Christians were faithful in their giving! The scriptures also teach that Godly principles work whether one is a believer or not. Jesus said, “I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For ~~he~~ God makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:44-45) An example of this in our own time is the Mormon Church who worships a false Christ and yet, because they embrace and live tithing at a much higher level than God’s true church they have accomplished a great deal. The thought, for me, of the Christian Church tithing faithfully and releasing blessings on themselves in the giving and blessings on the poor and lost is staggering to my mind.

Blessings of Joy

Reason number three is that giving as taught in the scriptures sets you free from the materialism of the world and enables you to have joy and peace. Research shows that people who give sacrificially to their church or charities have the highest happiness or joy levels in their life, far above those who do not. This is shown to be

true even in spite of one's own suffering. What about those who suffer? The Bible teaches, "Whoever despises his neighbor is a sinner, but blessed is he who is generous to the poor." (Proverbs 14:21) The wise author of Proverbs 22 wrote, "Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor." (Proverbs 22:9) The Apostle Paul carried this forward writing, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction." (1 Timothy 6:9) It is difficult to be generous when one is trapped by this world's materialism. When Paul spoke to the elders in Ephesus concerning his hard work in ministry he told them to remember the words of Christ, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35)

In America everything is sold with the concept it will make you more likeable, more successful and happier. As young people we think we can have it all and it all will define who we are. Success is money. Older people who have gone through the ups and downs of life and chased success want money for it will erase or cover over what they have not accomplished. They believe life will be empty and painful without it. Only through Christ and His making us anew spiritually do we find a life of peace and joy. Jesus said to His followers, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27) Jesus' peace is found in living the lifestyle modeled by Christ: meditation on the Word, prayer, giving of one's self and one's resources for the advancement of the gospel. Research shows that the young and single are less likely to give than those who are married and older. If one is committed to Christ age and marital status does not matter for we have given our lives to Christ and dedicated our lives to serve Him. Giving and serving is an important part of the life of a Christian and brings joy and blessing in all

circumstances.

So for these three reasons I am speaking concerning money and giving. First, it places believers in the good company of Christ and the Apostles. Second, if we individually and collectively embrace the teachings concerning tithing - blessings will flow from God for both the giver and those we give to. Thirdly, living as Christ modeled and taught including giving sacrificially for His ministry will bring joy and peace that is lasting and far better than the wealth and luxury of the world.

Blessings of Three Essential Commands

The passage in Matthew chapter 6, verses 19 to 34 that we are focusing on this morning and next Sunday contains three essential commands. Everything else in this passage is meant to support and help us see these three essential commands as wise, right and joyful. What are these three essential commands given by our Lord Jesus?

The first is found in verses 19 to 21, ¹⁹“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” It begins with a negative, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth” and then gives the positive, “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

Second, beginning with verse 25, “... do not be anxious about your life ... ³¹do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ... ³⁴do not be anxious about tomorrow.” Anxiety is the opposite of the peace one finds in Christ.

Third, found in verse 33, Jesus said, “**seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.**” Have you asked yourself, “What is the focus of my life? What is it I seek and desire?”

Let’s look at how these three essential commands relate to each other. Beginning in verse 33, “**seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness**” this is an overarching command. One’s life should be marked with a passion to live by the saving, purifying, empowering, love and grace of God in your life as a beacon to the world. God’s salvation begins with your life, and then to your church and it ripples out to the world, as Jesus said, “**you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.**” (Acts 1:8) Our church should be filled with love and grace and mercy as Christ has given these to us for our benefit and His glory. We should sacrifice that He will be glorified in this dark world.

Next comes “**lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.**” This is a specific command of what seeking God’s kingdom involves. Seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness involves seeking riches in heaven rather than riches on earth. Seeking the kingdom means treasuring God and freeing oneself from the drag of the earth’s materialism imposed on people by the god of this world.

“**Do not be anxious**” is the condition of the heart by which we break free from our addiction to earth-treasure and give ourselves with passion to heaven-treasure. By living in faith to His promises God frees us from anxiety, and in this freedom we do not yearn for treasures on earth.

Those are the three main imperatives in the text. That is what Jesus wants us to be like: free from anxiety of this world, living life seeking His kingdom, spending our time here on earth laying up treasure in heaven. A “Christ-like” lifestyle brings

blessings. Blessings are the fruit of trusting Jesus as our Lord and Savior and Treasure. This is the normal Christian life — radical freedom from earthly things and earthly security having a joyful pursuit of God and His righteousness as our treasure.

Everything else in these 16 verses is foundation and supportive to Jesus' desire for Christians to live with a view of heaven and not be bound to this earth. Jesus tells us how to live in this way and He gives us a number arguments in this passage to help us understand. He spends most of His time giving us reasons not to be anxious in verses 25-34. That is what we will spend most of our time on next week. If any of you battle with anxiety, worry or fear, I hope you will begin praying that God will make you free and enable you to become a radical risk-taker for the kingdom of God; sharing the gospel and giving from the new heart of flesh God has given you.

Blessings of Giving

Today I want to simply focus for a few more minutes on the meaning of “**lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.**” What does this mean? Are you doing it? Jesus says to do it. But, are we?

Up to a point the text is plain, isn't it? Matthew 6, verses 19 and 20 reads, “**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.**” Here Jesus is saying there are two ways to live. You can live with a focus on accumulating material wealth while you are on the earth or you can live with a purpose of accumulating treasure in heaven. Jesus is saying the mark of a true Christian life is what our eye and heart desires. Reading beginning in verse 22, “**The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³but 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!” When our eye and heart is focused on Christ our lives will have an eternal effect and we will experience peace and joy here and everlasting joy with God.

Something else is crystal clear – laying up treasures in heaven and laying up treasures on earth are incompatible. You must choose between them. You cannot say, “I want both.” This is what verse 24 is teaching, 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.”

There is something about God and money that makes them masters. Either you are mastered by money and therefore ignore God or you are mastered by God and make money a servant of the kingdom. But, if either tries to master you while you are mastered by the other you will hate and despise it and you will not have peace or joy. This is why Jesus said it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Much money makes a cruel master for it places you under the ruler of this world, the prince of the power of the air.

Let me be more specific. If what Jesus means and is teaching is that we are to devote our lives to accumulating treasure in heaven, which I take Him to mean, increasing our joy in God in heaven is the main thing Jesus has in mind that we should do here and now. My understanding from the context is that we are to be giving rather than accumulating, for this brings peace and blessing. If laying up treasures in heaven is the opposite of laying up treasures on earth, then laying up treasures in heaven means giving in ways that magnify the worth of Jesus.

There are number teachings of Jesus in the scriptures that confirm that laying up

treasures in heaven means giving money away for Christ's sake rather than accumulating it. The world struggles with this balance of retaining and giving away.

One example would be what Luke recorded as Jesus taught both His disciples and the crowd gathered around Him, Jesus said, ³²“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. ³³Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. ³⁴For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Luke 12:32-34) Here Jesus explains how you are to “Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old” or our money bags should never be completely full, giving will provide for yourself “a treasure in the heavens that does not fail.” How does one accomplish this? You “Sell your possessions, and give to the needy.” As Americans we have excess and it would be best used for the kingdom of God and helping the needy. Only in America do we take things we do not use and rent a storage unit, paying money so no one else can use our stuff.

In other words, your possessions on earth are not for accumulating, but for distributing in ways that honor Christ. The added benefit is that our joy is increased. When we give, especially when we give so generously that we have to sell something to have anything to give, we show that Christ is our treasure and that we love others more than we love our own security and comfort. This has been difficult for me to come to terms with as a child raised in a home in which material wealth defined who you are.

We see Jesus teaching this principle, for example, in the Gospel According to Luke, “When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴and you

will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:13-14) Jesus says give to those who cannot pay you back. Why? Jesus gives us the answer; it is so you will be blessed “For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” When you give freely and generously because you trust Jesus to take care of you, you are laying up treasures in heaven you will be repaid “at the resurrection of the just.”

Randy Alcorn, in his book, *The Treasure Principle*, says on page 44, "I'm convinced that the greatest deterrent to giving is this: the illusion that earth is our home" The truth is this earth is not our home; Christ is our home. Paul understood this principle as he wrote in Philippians, “with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²²If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” (Philippians 1:20-23) Paul lived for treasures in heaven by giving of himself, both body and material possessions for the glory of Christ and the advancement of the kingdom. Should we not live this style of life? Should we not be laying up treasure in heaven? To do so means to fully recognize this earth is not our home and heaven is!

It means giving our children a vision of growing into adulthood grounded in the Word of God, secure in their convictions with an unshakable faith that will weather the storms of life and will not yield to the "spirit of the age." May our lives be lived for heaven and may we begin a lineage of Christ honoring Christians generation to generation until the return of our King! May our lives bring Him glory! Let us live to “lay up treasures in heaven!” “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) Amen and amen!