

Exceeding Righteousness: God and Your Stuff

Matthew 6, 19 through 34. We'll read and then we'll pray together. Jesus says, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body.

So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 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.

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. 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? 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? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.

They neither toil nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God 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? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for your word. We ask now by your spirit that you would teach us your word, that it would not just hit our ears, Lord, but that it would work in our minds and our hearts, that we would understand, that we would apply, Lord, that we would know and believe and trust that it is true.

God, may we not just be hearers of your word only, but doers. May we obey, Lord, if we know that you are trustworthy, if we know that you are good, if we know that you are God, then there is no reason why we should not receive your word and respond in faith and obedience. And so, Holy Spirit, come and teach us, move among us, and exalt Jesus in our hearts, over and above all else.

It's in his name we pray. Amen. You may be seated.

Well, in the early 2000s, a new reality TV show hit the air called Hoarders, and it has been on for 16 seasons. Each episode presents a heartbreaking story of someone who's unable to part with their stuff. Rooms filled with things that they can't let go of, boxes stacked to the ceiling, storage spaces full of possessions that they don't need, they don't use, and sometimes they don't even remember acquiring.

Maybe you've seen the show. Maybe you don't need to see the show. Maybe you've seen it in real life.

Maybe you've seen friends and family, loved ones, struggle with this debilitating malady. Maybe you've seen it in your own home. Either way, you've seen people buried under possessions that they think should serve them and yet somehow find themselves held captive to them.

I know there are significant psychological factors at play, but just practically, I have to ask, when I look at my own closet and I have at least three jackets I haven't worn in years but will never get rid of for a variety of reasons, get into those later, I have to ask, what is the difference between a hoarder and a collector? Is it the value of the stuff? It's only hoarding if it's worthless. Is it the amount of stuff? Well, three jackets is too much, but one jacket that you don't wear is perfectly fine. Is it the amount of the stuff? Is it the size or the cleanliness of the house that homes the stuff? As long as the house is put together or you can't see the stuff, don't open that door.

What is the difference between hoarding and collecting? See, most people watch that show from a safe distance or even from judgment, disconnecting themselves from it and saying, that's extreme. That's not me. But I think Jesus' words in our text would challenge that assumption because according to Jesus, the real issue is not the things that we can't let go of.

The real issue is the heart that can't let go. We all have things that we struggle to let go of. We struggle to loosen our grip on the things that we believe will provide safety and security.

And these things that we believe will provide safety and security, Jesus calls treasures. A treasure is something that you place enormous value on. It's something that it would hurt to lose.

It's something that you even organize your life around protecting and pursuing. And so Jesus raises a compelling question. What if the treasures in your heart, excuse me, what if the treasures your heart is holding on to is actually interfering with your ability to experience peace? See, Jesus says that there are two kinds of treasures.

There are treasures on earth and there are treasures in heaven. Now that word treasure can bring a variety of different things to mind. We say every Sunday that Jesus is our greatest treasure.

And when we do, some people think about an emotional affection, like a school girl swooning over her crush, writing his name in her notebook over and over and over again. Oh, we just treasure Jesus. And for some of you, that is the emotional reaction that you have when you think about Christ as your greatest treasure.

Some hear the word and only think of something that pirates hid in the sand hundreds of years ago. And so Jesus is my treasure. Like I need the map, it's the Bible.

And so I'm looking for the clues to find the X that marks the spot where I will dig and uncover Jesus. Still other people will hear the word treasure and picture Gollum. I've been working on that one for years.

Thanks. Appreciate it. For Jesus, earthly treasures refer to the material things that we accumulate.

And we know this because of what he says threaten the treasures. Moths eat clothing. Rust or vermin, depending on your translation, eat things away.

And thieves steal everything else, money, possessions, flocks, and herds. And so the point that Jesus is making is simple, that earthly treasure is unstable. Some of you know this firsthand.

Some of you know how unstable earthly treasure and wealth are. For many today, the recession in 2008 was insanely difficult. You saw your net worth dwindling.

Or maybe 2008 was nothing compared to the fires and mudslides locally. People who lost entire lives to natural disasters. Maybe COVID decimated your savings and your opportunities.

Maybe there's still some other tragedy that you've endured. Maybe you've weathered it. Maybe you're currently facing it.

But because of their instability, you hear Jesus' words and you can agree that they are nothing to build your life on. And if you do, it takes a very small thing to not only bring your treasures, but to bring your life crumbling down with it. And so Jesus says, because of their instability, don't go storing them up.

Don't store up treasures on earth. But doesn't that feel counterintuitive? Isn't it the instability, the fleetingness of these valuable things that makes it necessary to store up more? This is why people in older times would build multiple barns and they would store their grain in multiple barns. So if one barn burned down, they weren't destitute.

And in the same way today, we diversify our portfolios. We keep all of our assets and all of our wealth in different things so that if the market affects this sector, then this one is still okay. Don't we need to diversify Jesus? Don't we need to build up a variety of treasures to keep our lives from crumbling down with them? We invest in gold and silver and property.

And in this asset and that stock, the more diversified our investments, the safer we are. But

Jesus says that his kingdom people, the kingdom citizens that he is creating for heaven, his kingdom people do not build their life around protecting unstable treasure. Instead, they pursue a different treasure.

They pursue treasures in heaven. But how do we do that? How do we pursue treasures in heaven? Well, Jesus answers that question with a riddle about two eyes. Now, when we read this, this section feels like Jesus is changing the subject.

Like what is this thing about two eyes? What does this have to do with anything? Jesus is not changing the subject. He's still talking about treasures. He says the eye is the lamp of the body.

If your eye is good, your whole body will be light. If your eye is bad, your whole body will be darkness. And that sounds strange, but in the ancient world, the phrases good eye and bad eye were expressions to refer to generosity.

A good eye, a person with a good eye was generous. A person with a bad eye was stingy. I'll prove it to you.

Proverbs 22.9 says, whoever has a bountiful eye is what the ESV says. It's literally translated, whoever has a good eye will be blessed for he shares his bread with the poor. A person with a good eye shares his bread, shares his food.

Contrast that with Proverbs 23.6-8. Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy. Literally, do not eat the bread of a man with a bad eye. Do not desire his delicacies for he is like one who is inwardly calculating.

Eat and drink, he says to you, but his heart is not with you. You will vomit up the morsel that you have eaten and waste your pleasant words. So the good eye sees what it has as something to share.

The bad eye sees what it has as something to guard. Jesus is not changing subjects here. He's actually teaching us how to pursue heavenly treasures.

The way we pursue treasures in heaven is by being generous with our treasures on earth. The way we store up for ourselves treasures in heaven is by giving away the things that we treasure on earth. Jesus is saying the way that you handle your possessions reveals what is happening in your heart.

A generous heart gives itself away like a lamp gives away light. A stingy heart hides itself in darkness. And then Jesus says something sobering, quite terrifying really.

He says if the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness? So if a good eye is like a lamp that shines light and a bad eye is hiding that light, being stingy, not giving away, Jesus says that it is possible to have a life that looks like light but is actually coming from a place of stinginess. And if that is the case, if the light in your life is actually coming from a place of darkness, how

great is that darkness? How deceived are you in believing that you're putting off light when you're not? And so Jesus is saying that it's possible to appear generous while still hoarding. You can give but still keep score.

Some people know exactly how much money they have ever lent, particular individuals or like all individuals. They're keeping track. They appear very generous but inwardly calculating.

You can still give and demand influence. You can give and secretly believe that your giving gives you leverage. You can tithe to the church a full 10 percent, more than 10 percent, and still worship wealth.

Jesus says if the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness? So many people today operate out of fear of scarcity, and instead of calling it fear, call it financial wisdom. I'm just being wise. Some people are anxiously protecting themselves instead of trusting God, but they don't call it lack of faith, they call it stewardship.

Now stewardship and wisdom need to be applied to our finances 100 percent, but the most powerful and dangerous idols are the ones we rename with respectable titles. You can call it what you want, but if it's coming from a heart that fears scarcity rather than a heart that trusts God, it's revealing that the real issue is not about what we have, but about what we worship. And so Jesus brings the whole conversation about wealth to its center at this next point.

He says, no one can serve two masters. Notice he doesn't say you shouldn't serve two masters. You shouldn't have two full-time jobs and two bosses, like no one can do that.

And you're like, I've been keeping down four jobs for the last 10 years, like challenge accepted. He's not saying that nobody should serve two masters, but if two masters truly have equal authority in your life, he's saying nobody can serve two masters. It's not possible.

Eventually one will win out over the other. Eventually you'll have two bosses call you in to work Saturday, and you can't do both. You're going to choose one.

Jesus says you cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money. Either money is a tool to be used in service for God, or it will become a rival lord in your life, warring against allegiance to God.

And so most people would never say, most people would never say, I serve money. I worship money. Like, let me bring you into my house, show you my shrine, lighting candles to Benjamin.

Like nobody does that. Nobody has the place in their house where they're burning incense to the dollar. And yet, where do we look when we're afraid? Do you look to Jesus or do you look to your bank balance? How many times a day do you check your bank balance? And how many times a day do you pray? What determines whether you feel secure? The presence of God or enough money to cover your bills? What keeps you up at night? The fact that people in this world are lost and condemned to apart from Christ? Or the mortgage, the rent that's due?

When trouble strikes, are you first, is your first response to pray your way through it or figure out a way to pay your way out of it? So nobody says that they serve money.

And yet, when crisis comes, our hearts reach for the thing that we truly trust in more than anything else for our safety and our security. We instinctively cling to what we feel when we feel vulnerable. Sorry, what we instinctively cling to when we feel vulnerable reveals what we worship.

And Jesus says that you can't build your life on two different gods. You can't build your life on two different foundations, on two different authorities, on two different goals. A divided heart cannot stay divided forever.

Eventually, you will have to choose one over the other. There's a scene in the Old Testament that I think brings a remarkable clarity to this, an interesting context to Jesus' words. In 1 Kings 18, the prophet Elijah gathers all of the people of Israel, along with the prophets of Baal, a false rival god to Yahweh in Israel.

And Elijah stands before the people and asks, how long will you go limping between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him. It's one of the most haunting questions in scripture.

How long will you go limping between two opinions? How long will you try to serve two incompatible masters? You can't do it. And if we're honest, this is the story of many religious people today. On Sunday, we come in and we sing that Jesus is Lord, but then throughout the week, we live as wealth is Lord.

Or we come in and we talk about how Jesus is our greatest treasure, but then throughout the week, we rarely give him notice because we're consumed with accumulating what we really want. Jesus says, you can't keep doing that. The divided heart won't work.

You cannot serve God and money. And this is why the encounter with the rich young ruler later on in Matthew is so powerful. This man, if you know the story, if you don't, I'll tell you this man comes to Jesus and says, Jesus, what must I do to inherit this eternal life that you're talking about? And Jesus says, you know, the commandments, you know, that you shall not kill, you shall not steal, honor your father and mother, all this.

And the man goes, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I've done all that. I'm good.

I've been keeping the commandments since the day I was born, but something is missing. And Jesus says, 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. And the man goes away sad, not because he, it says he went away sad before he had great wealth.

He's not sad because it's going to take him a long time to like sell the stuff on Facebook marketplace and carp swap. And he's like, I just really want to follow Jesus now, but I've got to

find buyers. That's not why he's sad.

He's sad because his possessions possess him. And he knows that he can't let go because it's got a grip on his heart. Our hearts cling to what we believe will secure our lives.

And if the treasure we cling to is not God, that attachment will keep us from trusting God and finding rest in him. And Jesus knows exactly what happens when we have this conversation. Jesus knows exactly what happens when the Holy Spirit comes and puts his finger on this area of our hearts.

He knows exactly what's going on in your mind and your heart right now. Fear is rising. Fear and insecurity wells up in us because whatever we trust becomes our security.

And if money is our security, then generosity will feel dangerous. And when Jesus calls us to be generous, then Jesus now is a threat to our true God. And what do we do when our idols, when our real God is threatened? Anxiety, fear.

And so Jesus addresses it and says, do not be anxious. Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink or about your body, what you will wear. Do not be anxious about these essentials, these necessities.

He says, your father feeds the birds. Your father clothes the grass of the field. He says, you are so much more valuable than grass and birds.

He says, your father sees you. Your father knows you. He knows what you need.

He knows that you need all of these things. Notice, Jesus is not like the Buddhists who say, you don't need this stuff. This is earthly stuff.

It's not real. It's an illusion. You have to transcend this physical world and then you'll find peace.

Jesus says, no, you need these things. He's not ignorant of how we were made. He says, you need these things.

Your father in heaven knows that you need these things. And you are so much more valuable than birds and flowers. Your father knows that you need these things.

And so the question, the real question is not, do you need them? The real question is, do you trust the father to provide what you need? Church, do we trust that God will really provide the things that we need? Do we trust that if we woke up tomorrow and had nothing, that in Christ, we still have everything? Do we believe that our father in heaven will really care for us if we lose the ability to care for ourselves? And some of us right now feel the anxiety of that question. Because maybe you're here and you believe in God intellectually, but you don't know if he can be trusted to carry the weight of your security. You don't know what it would look like or how you could ever get to the point of trusting him without everything that you've built for yourself.

And Jesus says, it's not accumulation that will give you peace. It's actually letting go of it that will finally teach you that your security and provision is not dependent upon you. You'll finally know the freedom of trusting God when you let go of the things that you are trusting in.

I've seen these videos online. It was before AI, so I know it's real. I'm really concerned for myself, y'all, about believing some of the stuff I see online, but this is legit.

There are these hunters in Africa who hunt monkeys. And they do it by carving these little holes out in rocks and hiding food in the rocks. And the monkeys come and they put their hand in the rock and they grab the food and then they can't get their hand out of the rock.

And the hunters come with these canvas bags and swoop up the monkeys and take them away. And some of us feel like all we need is more stuff in our hand. Meanwhile, the hunter is coming.

The enemy prowls like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour, and yet we're stuck hanging on to our stuff when freedom is available in Christ. If we let go of the stuff and run to Him. So some of us feel that anxiety of not being able to get enough.

Some of us feel conviction right now. And that conviction, trust me, is mercy. The presence of the Spirit of God addressing the idols of your heart, speaking to your soul.

You can even see the beauty of the life that Jesus is describing. Imagine a life free from greed, open-handedly trusting God for all that you need. And yet in that, fear rises.

Because what if I let go? What if I loosen my grip? What if everything is gone? Listen carefully. Some of you will feel that conviction and right now you're having this emotional experience that I have had countless times in churches before where you know I just have to hold on for the next hour. And then I can leave and then I can go fill my mind with something else or I just need to hold on for this week and the next Sunday there will be a new sermon with new conviction that'll feel more manageable.

Something that I can actually do. I know I'm just trying to survive the sermon. I'm just trying to survive the conviction.

Be careful. Because if you repeatedly resist the voice of the Holy Spirit in your life, continually resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit, our hearts grow dull. Our consciences become seared.

The voice of God becomes quiet in our lives, not because he's speaking softer, but because we've stopped listening. And if we continue in that way for long enough, what will bring us back except for faith and repentance? What will bring us back except finally softening our hearts and obeying the Word of God? Repent. Turn from the hardness of heart.

Obey Jesus' words and experience your hard heart. Begin again to feel his love and his kindness. Don't survive the sermon.

Trust in Jesus. And some of you are so angry right now because you believe that all churches

want is your money. And you've stayed away and you've given Jesus and the church one more chance and you came in and you're like, here it is again.

Another sermon about money. Do you want to know why? Do you want to know why this topic keeps coming up? It's because it keeps coming up in Scripture. You know, Jesus talks more about money than he talks about heaven and hell combined.

The reason is because your fear of hell and your desire for heaven will do nothing for you unless your heart lets go of your money. We don't, I don't care about your money. Jesus cares about your money.

You know why we keep talking about it? Why we won't leave it alone? It's because Jesus doesn't leave it alone. He doesn't leave it alone because he refuses to leave you alone with your idols because they're destroying your intimacy with God. And they're destroying the thing that God wants to make you into something beautiful that doesn't look like the world, but looks like Christ who trusts his father in heaven to provide.

Jesus loves you too much to just turn a blind eye when you're trusting in something other than him. So go ahead, be angry. Cling to your idols.

Gain the whole world and forfeit your soul or loosen your grip. Be generous with your wealth and discover that it's not just a slogan. Jesus is your greatest treasure.

Whether you know it or not, he is. And some of you will respond to Christ's word and discover something incredible. Freedom.

Freedom from the grip that money and possessions have had on your heart. Jesus says where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. These treasures in heaven, they're not spiritual brownie points to be received at a later date.

These treasures in heaven are available to us today in the presence and power of Jesus in our lives. These treasures in heaven that we pursue by investing our earthly treasures, our time, our talent, our resources, we invest them into the kingdom that we truly want. Is that kingdom here on earth perishable with your life? Or is that kingdom secure, kept for you in the presence of God? Rather than investing your time, talent, and treasure into something perishable, invest it into the kingdom that Jesus has already built for you.

A kingdom that will never be shaken. So let me ask you a question. If the economy collapsed tomorrow, or if your savings disappeared, or if the things that you worked so hard for suddenly vanished, would Christ be enough? Would Jesus be enough for you? Some of you know that he is because you've weathered this storm.

And today you live differently. Some of you know that he is enough. You've weathered this storm, and yet you're living the same way you did before it was taken.

You know that he provided for you, and yet your heart is still clinging to these faulty things. That question, whether or not Jesus is enough, reveals what has become our functional savior. Jesus is inviting us into something so much better.

A life where our scarcity is not stored in accounts, or our security is not stored in accounts and possessions, our security is not stored in something scarce, but in the unshakable love of a Father who's already given us everything. He's already given us his Son. So that question of whether or not we trust God to provide our daily essentials, the reason we can answer yes to that, the reason that we can trust God to provide what we need, is because he has already proven his desire to provide.

So we can trust that God will provide. One, because Jesus says so. He says, your Father will provide for you.

If we trust Jesus, then Jesus' words should be enough. But another reason is because God has not left us with mere words. He's given us evidence of his desire to provide.

The Apostle Paul says, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? The reason we can trust the Father to provide is because he's already proven his desire to give us everything in Christ. God clothed himself in flesh, and entered our humanity. He left his wealth and his glory, and entered into our poverty.

2 Corinthians 8-9 says, for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. He entered our poverty and took upon himself our greed, our divided hearts, our anxious unbelief. He carried it all to the cross, crucified it there with him, was put into the grave, and yet three days later rose from the grave to bring our lives into eternal life with God, and leaving our sin in the dirt.

And scripture says that God owns everything. Everything in the universe, God owns it. It's his.

And so literally, it costs him nothing to provide it for you because he has infinite wealth. And so the reason that we can trust God to provide for us what costs him nothing is because he already provided that which costs him everything. He has already given us everything.

He'll give us the food that we need. He'll give us the provision that we need. He'll give us the clothing that we need.

He will provide our earthly necessities because he's already given us a heavenly treasure. And so Jesus says, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all of these other things they'll be added unto you. Now some of you know this isn't theoretical.

You're in the middle of it. You need to know that your father feeds birds and clothes flowers every day, and he will do the same for you. Your life today might look different than it looked yesterday.

Your life might look different tomorrow than it looks today. But whether yesterday, today, or forever, if you trust in Jesus, your provision has always come from God. It continues to come from God.

And it will continue to come from God. And so you can trust him more and more each day. And as you do that, panic will loosen.

That greed will begin to die and the anxiety will lose its authority that it has over your heart because wealth will no longer be your refuge. Christ will be your refuge. Wealth promises security, but it doesn't love you back.

Possessions can comfort you, but they can't forgive you of your sin. And money can buy lots of different options, but it's not going to save your soul. Only Christ can do that.

And when he becomes your treasure, giving and generosity will stop feeling like death, and it'll feel like freedom. So let's turn together today. Turn from greed.

Turn from acquiring. Turn from trusting in perishable things. Let's confess to God what we worship that is not him.

Let's confess our temptation to find our security in all sorts of different treasures. Name them, confess them to God, and we can leave this place more free than we were when we walked in. That means for some of us, we need to confess and repent and obey very practically.

You may need to give in a way that costs you. Maybe you've been giving, but it hasn't been sacrificial. Maybe it's been the appearance of light, but it's come from darkness.

You need to give in a way that costs. Maybe some of us need to simplify our lives, go full minimalism, and learn that our possessions could never be counted on, and so our lives are more free without them. This is the important thing, is Jesus is not trying to make your life smaller.

He's trying to make your heart whole. He's not trying to make your heart smaller. He's trying to make your worship bigger.

He's trying to make your trust more free. He's inviting you into the life of the kingdom that is not anxious about tomorrow. It's a kingdom where our hearts are undivided, and it's a life that's no longer stressed about earthly treasures because our greatest treasure is not something that we can acquire.

It's something that has come down for us from heaven. Jesus is our greatest treasure. Amen.

Amen. And so, Lord, we confess that our hearts are so willing to trust in other things when all that we have comes from you, Lord, and I pray today that we would leave this place trusting our Father in heaven more than ever. And so, Lord, we let go.

We loosen our grip on all that we have tried to find our security in, and believe, Lord, that you are God, that you are good, and, Lord, nothing will steal us out of your grip. And so, Lord, use this time. Holy Spirit, come and continue to apply your words to our hearts, Lord.

Transform us. I pray that if there's anyone here whose heart is so hard that they refuse to listen to your words, God, would you gently, lovingly, graciously soften their hearts that they would experience your words not only as true but as good and desirable. So set us free in Jesus' name.

Amen.