

Pastor Don Nelson Sermon:

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

“TRUST AND TREASURE (Part 1)”
Matthew 6:19-24

Consider money.

☑ {T Hobbes} If you have too little, it might cost you your life. In some times and places the existence of the poor is best depicted as **“nasty, brutish, and short.”**

If you have too much, it might cost you your soul. Wealth has a way of distorting our perceptions, garbling our priorities, and warping our values.

We cannot survive without money. Yet it is surprisingly difficult to really *live with* very much of it.

📖 I've been using the word “money”, but I have more in mind than mere currency. Money symbolizes currency *and* the real estate and material goods we buy with it *and* services we purchase with it *and* opportunities we procure with it. Together, they add up to *wealth*.

The relationship between human beings and wealth is complicated. I say “relationship,” for though wealth is not a biological organism neither is it simply an inanimate object. The way we connect with wealth imbues it with a sort of proto-life or virtual-life.

Moreover, this relationship is significant. How we interact with wealth exposes and influences our relationship with God and others.

❓ How do you and I think of wealth, speak of wealth, and deal with wealth?

❓ What is our relationship with money and all that it symbolizes?

● {Ex 16} Imagine you are a Hebrew man or woman, formerly enslaved in Egypt. It has been two and a half months since Moses led you into the barren waste. You and the other hungry people cry out, **“If only we had died...in Egypt! You have brought us out into this desert to starve [us all] to death.”**

{Ex 16:4, 16} YHWH hears you and **“[rains] down bread from heaven.”** Each family is to go out and **“gather as much as they need”** every morning, except on the Sabbath.

{Ex 16:17-18} To your amazement, those who collect a lot of manna **“[don't] have too much”** and those **“who [collect a] little [don't] have too little. Each [has] just as much as they [need].”**

{Ex 16:19} The LORD is giving you this bread not to stockpile, but to eat. Thus, Moses announces that **“No one is to keep any of it until morning.”**

{Ex 16:20} **“However, some of [you pay] no attention; [you keep] part of it”** overnight. You assume that hoarding is the sensible course of action. (After all, to the hungry bread is wealth, and wealth has a knack for instilling a terrible fear of loss.)

{Ex 16:20} Yet hoarding only *seems* to be prudent. By morning your stash reeks and it is **“full of maggots.”**

{Ex 16:24} The only time this does not happen is on Saturday, which is the Sabbath. Cooking is prohibited then, so the Living God commands Israel to gather twice as much every Friday and keep half of it overnight. By his power it stays fresh and maggot-free.

? What is going on here?

⊖ Harvesting manna for today's need is a good thing. Hoarding manna is an act of disobedience to, and distrust in, God. Anyone who squirrels it away is putting more trust in bread than in the One who gives it.

■ That brings us to Matthew 6:19-21. Christ Jesus cautions,

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

? Where are we storing our wealth? Or, to put it another way, what kind of treasure are we accruing?

Is it cash, stocks and bonds, gold, real estate, luxury cars, antiques, works of art, and fine clothing? Or is it love of God embodied in worship, prayer, giving and obedience? Is it love of neighbor embodied in relationships of compassion, mercy, and justice?

Material wealth is not intrinsically bad. It is a useful instrument in service to bodily existence and spiritual life. The trouble starts when we treat it as treasure instead of a tool.

★ Material wealth makes terrible treasure because it is transitory. It cannot last.

{Prov 23:5} Like the hoarded manna which **“was full of maggots and [stank],”** so **“moth and rust”** are apt to

“destroy” and **“thieves [to] break in and steal”** worldly treasure.

Hence, the wise man warns: **“Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.”** That is a generalization, not a moral law. Plenty of people die with their estate intact.

{Lk 12:20} But what then? **“Who will get what you have prepared?”**

If you plan well, it will be your appointed heirs; if not, then the Internal Revenue Service. Either way, it won't be you: material wealth is transitory.

★ Even worse, when people treat material wealth as *treasure* it anchors their souls to the world, **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

This is not about the Earth as a planet. We belong here. Genesis 2:7 states that **“the LORD God formed... man from the dust.”** In fact, the name Adam sounds like the Hebrew *adamah* which means **“ground.”**

{Ro 8:21} The Creator has given us the Earth as our good home. We have damaged it; but when Christ returns **“the creation itself will be liberated from bondage to decay and brought into freedom and glory.”**

Many say the **“new earth”** language in Revelation 21 indicates evacuation to an entirely different planet. But I contend that is more in keeping with what we know of God that he will redeem and renew this one, making it like new.

{Gal 1:4; Eph 6:12; 1 Jn 2:16} When I say material treasure anchors souls to the world, I am speaking of **“the present evil age.”** The world consists of systems and individuals who are dominated by **“spiritual forces of evil.”** It takes shape in **“the cravings of sinful people, the lust of their eyes and the boasting about what they have and do.”**

{1 Jn 2:17; Mt 16:26} All that is **“[passing] away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”** So **“What good will it be for [us] to gain the whole world, yet forfeit”** our souls? And what loss is there if we forfeit the world, yet gain our soul?

- {Mk 10:17-22} A young man **“[runs] up to [Jesus]... [falls] on his knees before him”** and asks, **“Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”**

Some people question Jesus with devious intent, to make trouble. Others question him casually, to satisfy intellectual curiosity.

Not this guy! His swiftness and his posture prove sincerity and investment. He craves life, and he trusts the Rabbi from Nazareth to show the way.

“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” In reply Jesus lists several commandments. The fellow’s spirit is soaring now! **“Teacher,”** he declares, **“all these I have kept since I was a boy.”**

The Lord looks at him, loves him – and shatters his hope: **“One thing you lack. Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”**

“At this the man’s face [falls]. He [goes] away sad, because he [has] great wealth.”

‣ What is going on here?

- ⊖ Mastering money and possessions is good. Being mastered by them is bad. Messiah does not typically require poverty; but when he does, those who refuse to do so have elevated wealth above God.

- Matthew 6:24: **“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”**

{Php 2:11} Α κυριος [kúrios] (**“master”**) is one who has authority and control. Κυριος is one of Messiah’s foremost titles, as when we say **“Jesus Christ is Lord.”**

North Americans bristle at the notion that they have a master. We imagine that we are autonomous individuals who think independently and act without constraint.

Yet how many “autonomous individuals” settle for jobs they find boring or meaningless because they pay well?

How many “autonomous individuals” lie, cheat and otherwise compromise their principles for money?

How many “autonomous individuals” risk prison by stealing what they are not able or willing to buy?

How many “autonomous individuals” sacrifice health or family life or marriage in their quest for abundance?

- ★ Material treasure makes a good servant, but a demonic master. Not only is it transitory; not only does

it anchor one's soul to the world; it demands what belongs only to God: our trust and devotion.

☑ We underestimate materialism and consumerism at our peril. To quote Roland Chia: those **“who [display] divided loyalty [are] not demonstrating ... partial commitment to God, but rather... deep-seated idolatry. Either God is served with single-hearted commitment, or he is not served at all.”**

{Ex 16:15} Going back to Exodus, YHWH sends manna not just to save Israel from starvation, but so they **“will know that [he] is the LORD [their] God.”** So it is with all that he provides us.

❓ Are we mastering money? Or is it mastering us?

■ Matthew 6:22-23: **“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”**

Material treasure distorts our perceptions, garbles our priorities, and warps our values. Storing up treasures in heaven (instead of on earth) and serving the Living God (as opposed to Mammon) requires spiritual illumination and clear vision.

Lord, have mercy! Give us eyes to discern the limited value of money and possessions. Give us insight to perceive the limitless value of heavenly treasure. Grant that we might love and serve you above all else.

Matthew 6:19-24 is the word of the Lord.