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God and Mammon (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this speech, Steve Gregg emphasizes the importance of aligning personal values with the will of God. He explains that believers should strive to keep their conscience clear, even if it sometimes requires going against popular opinion. Gregg also stresses the need for Christians to prioritize eternal rewards over earthly treasures, arguing that wealth obtained here on earth is ultimately insecure and unsatisfying. Laying up treasures in heaven, he argues, is the key to a meaningful and fulfilling life.

Transcript

Matthew 6, beginning with verse 19. Now, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus takes some big categories that all have to do with practical living and, of course, our relationships with God and with one another. In chapter 5, when he was talking about the law, he was giving a basic teaching about what righteousness is.

In the first 18 verses of chapter 6, when he talked about charitable deeds and prayer and fasting, he was talking about what true and acceptable religion is to God. It has to be of the heart. And now, he begins to talk about values.

Values as something that sets a direction and a course for your life. Virtually everything that you choose is going to be based upon your core values. And everybody has them.

Not everybody has defined what they are, but everyone has them. There are some things, well, there are things that are important to you, and they are important to you in varying degrees. Some things are most important, essential, non-negotiables.

Others are important, but less so. And some things, of course, are unimportant, or even you have a negative importance to place upon them. They are important to avoid or to totally have nothing to do with.

But you could, if you understood your own workings of your own soul, I suppose enough, lay out a hierarchy on paper of what things you value most, what things you value least, and at the varying grades in between. And that would be your value system. Now, a value system is, as I say, that which dictates all decisions.

A decision between two options will always be determined by what you value most. If what you value most is to avoid punishment or to avoid embarrassment, then you'll always do the thing that someone else is requiring you to do. If that's what you value most is to have their approval.

If what you value most is to keep your conscience clear, there will be times when you'll decide to go against the tide of popular opinion and do something that's very different that your conscience tells you to do. Choices of careers, choices of marital status, choices of education and things like that are always going to be made on the basis of what you value. And although a lot of people don't sit down and reckon up what it is they value, and some people are not even aware of what their values are, everyone has them.

And Jesus addresses at this point the values that his disciples have as that which will govern their lives. And, you know, he's done that to a certain extent in the Beatitudes at the beginning of the sermon. Because the things that he said are a blessing are things, in many cases, the world would think is a curse.

A blessing to be persecuted, a blessing to mourn, is it a blessing to be meek, even though you get walked on and so forth. That's not what the world calls a blessing. The world doesn't value that.

But Jesus, when he says, well, the person who has this or is this way is enviable, blessed, that means that they have something of value. It, however, suggests a value system very different than that which the disciples possessed previously, no doubt, and which almost everyone possesses by nature. Part of the renewing of our minds as Christians, which Paul says has to happen in Romans 12, 2, part of the transformation that takes place by the renewing of our minds is certainly the renewing of our value system, or the replacing of old values with new ones.

And that's one of the things that has to get settled early on, because that's where your heart is. Your heart is into things that you value. That's what you treasure.

And Jesus said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. We're going to be talking about verses 19 through 24 of Matthew 6 today. And he said, 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 lamp of the body is the eye, therefore if your eye is good, the whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness. No one can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or else he will be

loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Now you probably know the word mammon, although it's not an English word, it's not even a Greek word, it's an Aramaic word. It refers to money. It refers, of course in this case, serving mammon would be to be motivated by a desire to obtain money.

It would be very similar to being greedy or covetous. Now, Jesus tells his disciples not to lay up treasures on earth, but to lay up treasures in heaven. Now this agrees pretty well with what he was saying earlier in the chapter, that when you do your religious deeds, you should do them in such a way as to guarantee a reward in heaven, not a reward among men necessarily.

He said in verse 1 of chapter 6 that if you do it the way the hypocrites do it, to be seen by men, you will have no reward from your father in heaven. Now when he says no reward from your father in heaven, it's your father that is in heaven, not the reward that is in heaven there. But the point is, to be rewarded by God, rather than to have such rewards as man can confer upon you, is the thing that Jesus says you should desire.

You should value that which God values. You should value that which is permanent and inviolable, that which thieves cannot break through and steal. That which will not rust or corrupt.

And you should desire things that are in heaven. Before we talk verse by verse about this section, I'd like to compare it with Colossians chapter 3, I think it is. Yes, Colossians 3, verses 1 and 2, which says, If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting, at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things above, and not on things of the earth. Set your mind on things above. The King James actually says, set your affections on things above, and not on things of the earth.

Sounds precisely like what Jesus is saying. You should have that which you treasure most, be that which is in heaven. And be laying up for yourselves such treasures in heaven, which will be yours forever, and which can never be violated.

You may be killed, you may be mugged, you may be robbed, the economy may collapse, the stock market may crash, and you may lose all your holdings on earth, but what you have laid up in heaven has not been affected negatively. You still have that waiting for you. And that's what Jesus says, which has complete value.

As I said when we were talking about 1 Corinthians 13, love has value because love endures. These things endure, faith, hope, and love. And they have more value than gifts, which do not endure, they will pass away.

And so also, earthly things do not endure. Moth and rust consumes them, and thieves

break through and steal. Now Jesus speaks fairly figuratively all the way through this passage.

For example, he says that your treasures on earth, moths and rust, will destroy. Well, some kinds of treasures on earth can be destroyed by moth and rust. Certainly clothing can be destroyed by moths.

And that's principally what he has in mind when he says moths, because clothing was a much more expensive kind of commodity in those days than now. We have, you know, machines that make cloth. We have easily produced dyes and so forth for clothing.

In the old days, cloth had to be woven by hand. And it also had to be dyed by, you know, the excruciating process of extracting tints from plants and roots and things like that, and berries, that was far more difficult and it required more labor, and therefore it was more expensive to buy the product. And a person's wealth was sometimes measured in the number of garments he owned.

And a person who owned three or four changes of clothing was a relatively wealthy person. So, when Jesus says don't lay up treasure on earth, one of the kinds of things that people would lay up as treasure to be a rich person on earth would be clothing. He says mobs can eat those.

And rust destroys other kinds. Now, it's hard to know exactly what he has in mind that is susceptible to rust. Of course, metal things are susceptible to rust.

Maybe iron tools or something that a farmer might have would be susceptible to rust. But buildings weren't made out of metal in those days. And they didn't have a lot of metal, you know, gadgets and stuff like we do, which rust.

I mean, maybe your toaster will rust or your juicer or some other thing that you've got in your kitchen. They didn't have those. Principally, the metals that people would have that would be considered treasures would be gold and silver.

But those don't literally rust. Gold doesn't rust and silver doesn't rust. But it's hard to know what metals he has in mind that would be regarded as treasures.

If you turn over to James chapter 5, however, you'll find that James talks about gold and silver actually rusting. And that suggests that we're using, this is a figurative description rather than literal because those metals don't rust in real life. But in James 5, James is rebuking the rich and saying in verse 1, Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you.

Your riches are corrupted, your garments are moth-eaten. Verse 3 says your gold and your silver are corroded. And their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

You've heaped up treasure in the last days. Now heaping up treasure is just what Jesus said not to do. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth.

He said if you do it, moths and rust may destroy them. James said that's happened. You rich men, your garments are moth-eaten.

Your gold and silver have been corroded or rusted. Now, as I said, gold and silver don't literally rust or corrode. So he's talking, figuratively speaking, that the value of your treasures is diminishing as if they were rusting away or corroding away.

The point is that they don't retain their value. Our coins don't rust, but they don't retain their value either. I mean, inflation takes care of that, and so do taxes.

Thieves break through and steal. Some of them are congressmen. And the point being that your wealth that's laid up on earth is never going to be secure.

You can have it, you know, in a Swiss bank. You can have it at Fort Knox. You can have it under your mattress with bolts on your doors and chains and machine gun nests at every corner of your house.

But there's still no guarantees that you're going to have it when you die. And if you do, it won't do you any good because you won't take it with you anyway when you do die. The point is that riches have but little value in terms of eternal things because your life, where you have these riches, is short.

And eternity is long. And obviously what is going to be of value to you in the long run is that which you can enjoy forever. James said, I mean, John said in 1 John 2.17, he said, And the world passes away, and the lusts thereof, but he that does the will of God abides forever.

Now suppose you love the world and the things that are in the world, and you treasure those things, and you hoard them up. And then the world passes away, but you abide forever. It means that all that you've had your heart set on, you're now separated from forever.

Whereas if you set your heart on things of heaven, you'll have them forever. You'll be able to be in the presence of those things that you love. And so Jesus is saying you should treasure and lay up as treasure things that can be permanently enjoyed in heaven and not that which is only enjoyable on earth, which is susceptible to moth, rust, thieves, and so forth, and a variety of other things that cause us to lose our wealth, sometimes just foolish spending or investing.

But you are to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break and steal. Now how do you do that? How would you lay up treasures in heaven? If somebody said, listen, would you go put this deposit

for me in the bank, I would know how to do that. I know where the bank is, I know where the tellers are, I know how to fill out the forms and make sure the money is transferred into the account.

But how do I put treasures in heaven? Where is the teller? Where is the receptacle where you deposit the money? Well, the Bible doesn't leave us to guess about that. It's actually told us in a couple of other places. One is in Matthew 19, verse 21, where Jesus, in speaking to the rich young ruler, said to him, If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven.

And come, follow me. He said, sell what you have, give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Now, there's another place where Jesus said something like that to his own disciples, in Luke chapter 12.

In Luke chapter 12, in verse 33, Jesus said, sell what you have and give alms. Provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches or moth destroys. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Provide for yourself treasures in heaven where thieves and moths don't get them.

How do you do that? Well, sell what you have and give alms. Give to the poor, in other words. The place to deposit your money in heaven is in the hands of the poor, apparently.

Give to the poor and you'll have treasures in heaven. Now, that wouldn't necessarily mean that every poor person, or necessarily that's the only way. It makes it clear that laying up treasures in heaven is by giving.

Using your money in ways that support the things that God is concerned about here. God's concerned about the poor. When you give to the poor, it says in Proverbs, he that has mercy on the poor lends to the Lord.

How do you get your money into God's hands? Put it into the hands of the poor. And, of course, in addition to that, you know, missionaries and pastors and elders and teachers and those kinds of things where people are doing the work of God. Of course, the Bible indicates that people can give to God, as it were, by giving to his servants.

So that Paul, when he was in prison in Rome, received a financial gift from the Philippians. They sent him some money. And he spoke of that as a sacrifice they had offered up to the Lord.

An acceptable offering of a sacrifice to the Lord. That's Philippians chapter 4. And let's see, I maybe want to start in verse 18. He says, Indeed I have all, and I abound, I am full, having received from Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you.

This gift, this financial gift sent to Paul, a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice,

well-pleasing to the Lord, to God. The sacrifice has been offered to God. But it was given as a gift to Paul.

Now, since they had done that, he says in verse 19, And my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. You gave your money to God. He will now, out of his abundance in glory, he will supply all your needs.

So, in a sense, you're putting your money on deposit in a secure place where it can be given back to you in time of need. You lay up your treasures in heaven, then you've got them there. And, you know, one reason people put their money in the bank is so it'll be there for them when they need it.

And if you lay up your treasures in heaven, it'll be there when you need it. Now, some of it may be needed before you go there. Some of it may be needed now.

But if your money has been laid up in heaven, it's in a secure place. Paul said that to Timothy. He said, Tell the rich this, that they should think this way.

In 1 Timothy chapter 6, verses 17 through 19. 1 Timothy 6, 17 through 19. Paul told Timothy, Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches.

Uncertain riches suggests, you know, the fact that thieves and moths and rust can get at them. They're not certain to be there for you. But to trust in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy.

Let them do good that they may be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come that they may lay hold on eternal life. Now, notice, these people who are rich should not trust in their riches because their riches are uncertain. They should lay up a foundation against the future by giving, by sharing.

They're storing up for themselves something for the future, for the time to come that way, by giving it away. Now, what Jesus is saying, of course, is that Christians ought to be thinking entirely differently than the conventional wisdom of the world with reference to finances. And finances is not some little area.

In bringing up finances and money and so forth in this passage, Jesus is not going off on a tangent, on a minor issue. Money is a major issue. It is spoken of more often than any other thing in the parables of Jesus.

In almost all of the parables of Jesus, they have something to do with money, finance, or something like that. There are a few that don't, but there are a heap of them that do. And it is said that something like 39 days of Jesus' life or 40 days of Jesus' life are recorded in the Gospels, of which there are like most of those, over 35 of them, he spoke

something about money.

Now, money is a big subject in the spiritual life because it is a competitor, for one thing, for our devotion to God. A greedy person, a covetous person, is said to be an idolater, Paul said. Covetousness is idolatry, he said in Ephesians 5.5 and in Colossians 3.5. So, money competes with God, which is why Jesus said you can't serve God and mammon.

It's an idol. But not only is it an idol, it is a symbol of your life because you measure your life in minutes and seconds and hours and days and time. Your lifetime is measured in just that, time.

But a great deal of your time is spent earning money and must be spent earning money because that's what's necessary for survival. It is the earning of money that prolongs your life, as it were. You can buy food and housing and things necessary.

But the earning of money also consumes a great deal of your life. In our society, typically about eight hours a day, but in Jewish society, it was more like 12 hours a day, six days a week. They did their labor six days every week and rested on the seventh.

But when they did a day's work, it was from sun up to sun down, generally speaking. So, it was most of their waking hours were spent laboring for money. And when they got that money, what they held in their hands symbolized the majority of their waking hours of their life.

Now, it's not really different now except we just spend fewer hours at it, but money still is symbolic of our life itself. We expend our life to get it and we expend it to get more life, to prolong our lives. And what we do with our money is of a piece with what we do with our lives.

It's not different. We can't be devoted to God in our lives but devoted to selfish things with our money. Where your treasure is, your heart is.

Now, you know that the proverb says, in Proverbs 4.23, guard your heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of, what? Life. The issues of life proceed from the heart. And Jesus said where your treasure is, that's where your heart is.

So, your treasure and your life are closely tied to each other. It's your money or your life. And he's saying that you need to make sure that your treasure is where you want your heart to be.

Wherever your treasure is, your heart's going to be on it. Now, that can be seen one of two ways. One is it could be a way of defining what he means by treasure.

Whatever your heart is into is what you treasure. I mean, I could be born in a wealthy family and have a tremendous estate but if I didn't care at all for it and all I really wanted

was to marry some little peasant girl who didn't have a penny, you know, I mean, totally hypothetical case, neither of those two things are true, but that girl would then be my treasure although I would have something many other people would treasure, I couldn't care less about that. My heart's not in it.

Where my heart is, is what my treasure is. But I don't think that's how Jesus is saying it though it may have that connotation too. What he is saying is where you put your treasures, namely your goods, that will be where your heart will follow.

Whatever is of value to you, your heart and it are going to be together. Your heart and your values or the things you value will always be inseparably connected. Therefore, if you are valuing things on the earth and laying up great treasures of this kind on the earth, your heart is going to be earthbound.

The concerns of your heart are going to be with the things of the world. You know, in the Great Depression when the stock market crashed and people committed suicide, you know, they jumped off buildings because they lost so much money. Frankly, I can't relate with that.

I've never had enough money that the loss of it would be a major crisis, you know. But it seems to me, as an objective person who isn't in that situation, that seems so foolish. But it's not really foolish because their money was their life.

Their money was their treasure and their heart was there. When their money was gone, they had nothing left of their life. They put all their values in that one thing and they had nothing left.

When it was gone. And that's, of course, the problem with putting your heart into anything in the world. It's all going to go.

It's all going to burn. And even if you can enjoy it your entire life, if that's where your heart is, you're knit together with this pleasure, this possession, this whatever, this relationship. If that's what your heart is into, when that comes to an end, and it will at death or at the second coming of Christ, you will no longer have that which your heart craves.

And therefore, you need to train your heart. You need to train your heart now to set your affections on things above and not things of the earth. There's a very good chance that when you became a Christian, you had a full complement of worldly values.

All of us pick them up in the course of life, either from what people tell us is valuable, we tend to pick up their ideas or else we make up our own, but we have them and they're usually not very well informed before we're Christians. Now that we're Christians, we realize that only what's eternal matters, only what glorifies God is good, and changes the whole perspective on things, but that doesn't change instantly. I mean, the basic attitude

does, but commitment to certain values don't change immediately.

I mean, some people think when they're in the world that the coolest thing is rock and roll music, and rock and roll musicians are really heroes and they're really cool. When you get saved, you may still feel that way. A lot of people, when they get saved, they just transfer their idolatry from secular rock and roll musicians to Christian rock and roll musicians.

They've still got the same idolatry. They haven't changed their values. They've just kind of sanitized them, I guess we could say, but they haven't changed them.

Now, really, if a person grows in the Lord, they'll realize that rock and roll musicians, Christian or otherwise, that's not a hero. He's not doing anything exceptional. I mean, maybe he plays music exceptionally well, but the ability to play music isn't what makes somebody great.

In the thinking of God, in the values that we embrace, the ability to play music isn't a fantastic thing. And in the world, we value people who are beautiful, people who are successful, movie stars and things like that. And when we come into the church, when we get saved, we find another kind of celebrities in the church, whether it's the prophets or the pastors or the whatever.

There's some class of people that we find that we look up to and we think of almost with the same kind of idolatry that we thought of toward other kinds of celebrities in the past. This doesn't mean we haven't really been converted. It just means that our value systems haven't been fully renewed.

Once we have decided that heaven is what matters and earth is just for a little while and our condition spiritual forever is infinitely more important than anything else, then we have to set about to adjust our thinking about all the individual things that were so important to us before and that we thought were impressive before and see that they're not. I've never met anyone who's better at being consistent in this than my wife is. Before I knew my wife, I used to be regarded to be real radical and all my Christian friends saw me as really being totally counter-cultural, radical, fanatical, Christian, not thinking like the world and not pursuing things of the world.

And when I married Kristen, I was amazed how many attitudes I still had that were worldly because she didn't have them. She challenged them. She's just more consistent than anyone I know in saying, well, why is that good? Why do you like that? Why is that important? There are a whole bunch of things I didn't even realize that I valued and thought were cool and neat and stuff that once they were really reexamined from the standpoint of the values that Jesus teaches, it wasn't really all that great.

It's like sports figures. I never cared about sports figures. We're a little concerned

because obviously Benjamin likes sports and we're not opposed to him liking sports, but there's nothing evil about sports in themselves perhaps.

But one of the problems that accompanies sports fandom is idolatry of players who really don't have anything for which they should be respected. I mean, they have muscles and you know me, sour grapes. But I suppose anyone could get muscles if they worked on it enough, if that was their goal, if that was their God.

I've known some pretty wimpy guys who got pretty muscular because that was the thing they valued. That was what they treasured. And boy, talk about something that doesn't last, you know.

Muscles, you know, when you get your muscles by weightlifting when you're a youth and then you get to about 60 years old or so, it looks kind of silly to tell you the truth. I mean, you can keep it up maybe a bit, but it just gets to be a losing battle. Talk about temporal treasures.

But I mean, even if there's something to be commended about it, an athlete's training and so forth that makes him good at shooting hoops or passing a football or something, what in the heck does it matter? What does it matter how many hoops were shot? What does it matter who wins the World Series? What does it matter, you know, what team wins in any conflict? The game is worthless. The game doesn't produce anything. It solves problems that were created for the sake of the game.

If there was no game to win, there'd be no problems to solve in it. It's an artificial thing that doesn't have any value before it's played or after it's done, nor during, except for entertainment value. But that's the whole thing.

I mean, Christians have a whole set of cultural values that they bring into their Christian life, which often are not very much challenged. I'm thinking of a pastor in particular right now who, when I met him, he was a great football fan. He still likes football, and that's fine.

But I mean, I challenged him on that. Why is it so important, this game? I mean, he was really into it. And he actually kind of got turned around right on that.

Pretty good. He still likes to watch the game once in a while, but he used to be a real fanatic on that. And, you know, he was a godly man.

He was a godly man. I had a pastor who would end the church service more promptly on Sundays when there was a game to go home and watch on TV than he would end it on days when there wasn't a game to go watch because sports were that important to him. By the way, he lost all his kids to the world, interestingly.

But, you know, he was preaching a good gospel, but his values, his kids could see what

his real values were. And we need to examine our values. I mean, even if you don't have kids that are at risk of following you the wrong direction, you're at risk of going the wrong direction.

And so Jesus is saying you need to have your values, your treasures. The things you treasure have to be those things that are in heaven, not the things that are on earth. Not laying up for yourself something that you value and treasure on earth, but in heaven.

Now, a question has to be asked about this, and that is, how absolutely true is it to be understood? I mean, taken at face value, Jesus forbids the laying up of treasures on earth. Now, having a bank account is laying up money. Is that treasures? Is that laying up treasures on earth? Buying a house, a car, a stereo system, a wardrobe.

I mean, aren't these treasures? Don't Christians do this? Should they? Should they not? Is Jesus forbidding this? That's a hard thing. There's, you know, if you just took it in the hardest sense, and that's the way I took it when I was younger, because I thought it was more radical and right to do it that way. I used to feel like, you know, you should virtually, you know, have nothing.

Because anything you accumulate is violation of the commands of Jesus. He said, don't lay up treasures on earth. If you accumulate things on earth, then you're violating what Jesus said.

Jesus wanted a community of paupers, a community of people who lived hand to mouth, who, like the Israelites in the wilderness, waited on God every day for new manna, because they didn't have anything left over from the day before. They just didn't have anything laid up. Just lived by faith all the time.

Well, frankly, to tell you the truth, I live by faith, but God's given me stuff, which I had to decide, well, does God just give it to me so I could get rid of it again, so I won't be laying it up, or is he giving it to me to use? And some of the stuff that he's given me, I've gotten rid of, and some of the stuff I use. But I have come to rethink the passage. Now, some would say, well, that's a classic case of a person, you know, reinterpreting Scripture to fit his new circumstances.

It happens. It really does. I won't deny it.

New circumstances do make you rethink Scripture. You're in danger if you rethink Scripture in such a way as to justify your new circumstances. You're now doing what you used to think was a sin, and so you just kind of change the way you look at the Scripture so that you don't feel like it's a sin anymore.

People do that kind of thing, and that's a dangerous thing to do. On the other hand, new circumstances growing into new things make you look at things from another angle. It makes you see, well, there is another way of seeing that.

I wonder if it means that instead. When you have kids, it makes you look at a lot of things differently. It doesn't mean that you're trying to justify something by changing your views.

It just means that you're in a new position. You've got a new perspective. When we grow into different things in life, we do get a new set of experiences to serve as a frame of reference for exegesis and looking at things.

I will say this. The reason I currently have a house, and we have two cars, and I even have a computer. In fact, we have two.

We have an old junker, and we have one that I use all the time. And we got, you know, everyone in our family has clothes, and we have some things. Things that I would have preferred not to have and even would have had convictions against having when I was a teenager and in my early 20s.

And, you know, I have to ask myself, is this backsliding, or was I imbalanced before? Well, there are some things that I need to consider here. If having nothing is the only way to obey Jesus when he said, lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth. Then, there were a number of people in the church in the early days who were in violation of it without being corrected.

Jesus himself even had friends who had homes, and he was entertained in their homes. Peter had a home, and he used Peter's home. Peter had a boat, and he used Peter's boat.

Lazarus and his sisters had a home, and they showed hospitality to the disciples on many occasions. Mary, in particular, sat at Jesus' feet and hung on every word, but she never got the impression that he had to sell her house, apparently, because she didn't, although she did have a bit of a luxury in that spikenard that she had stored up, which was about a year's wages worth of perfume, and she thought, well, that's got to go. And so she anointed his head with it.

But that's just the point. She had a house that she didn't vacate. She didn't sell her house, but she got rid of her perfume.

There are things, extravagances, that are quite foolish and wrong to lay up just because they have value in the world. They're earthly treasures. There are other things that God gives you for your use, for your use in his service.

And it would be much harder to serve God if you didn't have any clothes to wear. It would be hard to do some kinds of things for the Lord if you didn't have any transportation. In some parts of the world, it would be hard to survive and live for God without a roof over your head.

And for that reason, there are things that are perhaps possessions on earth that need not be regarded as treasures. You don't treasure them. Your heart isn't in them.

And so that's one way of, in some ways, softening what would otherwise be a very, very unyielding interpretation of this, that you can't own anything, or else if you have a bank account, you're laying up treasures on earth. There's a couple of other things to see about the passage, too. One is that there is the possibility that we've got here what we know we have in other passages, a limited negative, which means not only but also.

When Jesus said, I didn't come to bring peace on the earth but a sword, it should be understood, I didn't come only to bring peace but also a sword, because he did come to bring peace, but also a sword. That's called a limited negative. It's stated as an absolute, but it's understood as a limited negative, meaning not only this but also that.

If this statement in verse 19 were interpreted that way, it would mean, don't only lay up for yourself treasures on earth. Also, and more importantly, lay up treasures in heaven, which would simply be a corrective to what they were currently doing. They all had homes.

They all had possessions. They all had securities on earth that they, you know, that they possessed. And he could be saying, don't only have those.

More importantly, have those in heaven. In which case, he wouldn't necessarily be forbidding them to own things on earth. But I don't incline toward this interpretation.

I admit it to be a possibility because there are some who would take it that way. Don't only have treasures on earth. Also have them in heaven would be to add treasures to heaven to what you already have on earth.

Then you have it, you know, you have it, you're secure both ways. But I personally don't think so. I think that he is actually saying not to have treasures on earth.

The reason being, well, what we read in James, for example. In James, he criticized the rich men because they had laid up treasures for themselves on earth and moths and rust had corrupted them and had destroyed them. And he's obviously referring back to this passage.

He's saying you did what Jesus said not to do. You laid up treasures on earth and they're gone. So it sounds like laying up treasures on earth is something that is being truly discouraged.

Jesus himself didn't have any laid up. But there's another factor that mitigates against an overly severe interpretation and that is the expression in verse 19, for yourselves. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. If you're going to be looking out for yourself then look out for your eternal destiny. Lay up for yourself treasures in heaven.

On earth, Jesus doesn't want you looking out for yourself. He wants you looking out for the kingdom of God. As he says later in the same chapter, seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and these other things be added.

Well, how do you seek the kingdom of God? Well, it's by not serving myself. It's by not hanging on to my things for myself. It's by having my whole self, my whole life, my whole possessions, my whole family, everything about my life, having those things consecrated to God, not to me.

And if a person has money in the bank but all of his money is truly consecrated to the Lord and he's not going to spend it in any way except the way that he believes is going to be glorifying to God and serving of the purposes of the kingdom of God, has that person laid up treasures for himself on earth? He's laid up treasures on earth but not for himself. I think of, and I've mentioned him on other occasions, he's an obvious example that I think of. He's my father-in-law who has been rich several times, millionaire several times, and then not a millionaire in between times.

He's not a millionaire now though he's in a business that might make him rich again possibly before he dies. He's a guy who invents things, makes a lot of money, gives it all away, then he's poor for a long time until he hits on another winner and then he makes a lot of money again and gives all that money away. He's a philanthropist.

He actually gave away nearly a million dollars before he was saved. He wasn't even saved when he gave away his first million, then the next million he gave away after he got saved to missions and stuff like that. And he's a guy that as long as I've known him, which has been 13, 14 years now I guess, or 15, he's been a guy who's got a lot more money than I do and a lot more money than a lot of people I know do, but it's not for him.

He uses all of it for orphans in Haiti and for things like that. I mean, sure, he'll go out to Haiti once in a while. He'll pay for plane fares to come out and see his grandkids.

Some of it he uses as he considers to be within the will of God for his own needs and such, but what he has laid up, he has clearly not laid up for himself. And yet he's not really that exceptional in terms of what Christians should be. Most Christians won't have a million dollars in their lifetime, but they'll have something and they might have some of it laid up.

But it shouldn't be, at least for themselves. It should be for God, really, for whatever God wants. Now, this raises questions about the issues of retirement, for example, people putting away money for retirement.

This happens, of course, as a matter of course in our society. People are told they're crazy if they don't do it. Most jobs actually do it automatically.

They put aside something toward your retirement. In our society you're required by law to pay Social Security so that you'll have something when you're old to get back. I object to this, but I have to pay it anyway.

It's the law. Obviously, we can't be held accountable for paying Social Security. I mean, God's not going to penalize us for paying what the law requires us to pay.

But I guess the question arises, should we lay up money for retirement? Should we be making provision for retirement? My answer would be, Jesus said do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. But suppose your whole life now, as well as when you reach retirement age, is not really going to be living for yourself at all. You're going to be devoted to serving God.

That the food you eat, you eat to the glory of God, to strengthen you to do the work of God. That what you're doing, everything in your life is dedicated to the Lord. Suppose you laid up some money, and I do not ever intend to do this.

I can't imagine doing this. One reason I can't imagine having the money to do it, but if I had, I wouldn't want to use it this way, but to lay up money for when I get old. But there are people who might feel inclined, and I couldn't condemn them on the basis of this verse, say, well, when I retire from my company, I want to go on the mission field, and I'm saving up right now for that.

Or even if they're not going on the mission field, if they have some other goal for their life, which is related to pursuing the interest of the kingdom of God, and they are laying up money to support themselves at that time in the future, so that their kids don't have to support them, or so that someone else doesn't have to support them, or whatever, then it sounds to me like that's not really any more laying up treasure for themselves than supporting themselves now. I mean, if I support me, I'm supporting, I think, the interest of the kingdom of God, because I'm devoted to the interest of the kingdom of God. And I think all Christians are supposed to be devoted to the interest of the kingdom of God all the time, now and later.

I personally don't believe in what is such a common thing now, is the assumption that once you've put in a certain number of years of work, you ought to retire, and then you've got, you know, you deserve a little leisure. Get yourself an RV and cruise around the country, dye your hair blue, menopause blue, and go around and be, you know, grandparents at large, or something.