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Matthew 6:19 - 6:21 (Part 2)



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg continues his discussion on Matthew 6, emphasizing the importance of not laying up treasures on earth. He states that we cannot take these worldly possessions with us, and encourages listeners to give to the poor and those in need. Gregg also reminds his audience that hard work and providing for oneself is a biblical principle, and that relying solely on the support of others is not ideal. Ultimately, he emphasizes the importance of investing wisely in God's kingdom to lay up treasures in heaven.

Transcript

Today I'd like to talk a little more about this passage in Matthew 6, which was the subject of our talk last time. This is Matthew 6, verses 19-21. Jesus said, Now, last time I was talking about the various ways in which Jesus' words could be understood, and I settled on the view that when Jesus said, Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, that that phrase, for yourselves, was very decisive in understanding what he was getting at.

It was not that he was forbidding Christians to have any accumulation. He was not necessarily forbidding Christians to have money in the bank, for example, or owning a home, or having any other assets. But he was definitely saying, you should not do this in order to have assets for yourselves.

That is, you should not be motivated by a desire to become personally rich and to increase your own standard of living, when there are, in fact, very many needs of the kingdom of God all around you. The idea is, as we saw in Acts chapter 2 and Acts chapter 4, that the early Christians, none of them claimed that the things which they possessed were their own. Now, they did possess things, but they didn't claim they were their own.

They did not lay up for themselves treasures on earth, but their assets were available to God at a moment's notice. If they were poor, they'd sell them. That is, they'd sell their assets and give to the poor.

Now, that this is Jesus' meaning seems confirmed by some other passages. In Luke chapter 12, for example, Jesus tells that story of the rich man whose ground produced so

much crops that he couldn't contain them all in his barn. So he decided that he would build bigger barns, and he said, what shall I do? He said, I will do this.

This is Luke 12, 18. I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, soul, you have many goods laid up for many years.

Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, you fool, this night your soul will be required of you. Then whose will those things be which you have provided? So is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.

Now, obviously, that last line is a very clear connection to the thought of Matthew 6. Do not lay up treasures for yourself on earth, but lay up treasures in heaven. Jesus said in Luke 12, 21, so is he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. Now, this man, the rich man, was rich because of the blessing of God, no doubt.

I mean, his crops flourished, and God is the one who causes his sun to rise and his rain to fall on the good and the wicked. And this man benefited from the grace of God and the provision of God and so forth. But what happened was when he found that he had surplus, more than he needed, he wasn't sure what to do with the surplus.

In verse 17, it says he fought within himself, saying, what shall I do since I have no room to store my crops? Well, that's not a hard question to answer. If you have more than you need, there are things you can do with them that will help others who have less than they need. Now, here he said, what am I going to do? I don't have room to store up all my stuff.

Well, I could have given him a better answer than he came up with. How about give it? How about give some to the kingdom of God? How about give some to the poor? That's what God intends you to do when he gives you a surplus. And yet this man didn't get it.

He said, I'll do this. I'll build bigger barns and I'll store it that way. But then the man died.

And notice when God spoke to him, he says in verse 20, this night your soul will be required of you. Then whose will those things be which you have provided? In other words, you store them up for yourself. Now they'll belong to somebody else.

Whose will it be? Not you. And Jesus said, so it is with he who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. This man could have laid up treasures in heaven, but he did not.

Instead, he stored up treasure for himself. And that self is the issue here. James, an epistle that quotes from the Sermon on the Mount more than any other epistle in the New Testament, addresses certain people who are rich and who are not right with God.

And he says to them in James chapter 5, beginning at verse 1, come now you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth eaten. Your gold and silver are corroded and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire.

You have heaped up treasure in the last days. Indeed, the wages of the laborers who have mowed your fields, which is by you kept back by fraud, cry out. And the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabbath.

In other words, you have lived in pleasure on the earth and in luxury. You have fattened your own hearts as in a day of slaughter. Now, here these people have laid up riches for themselves.

And so much so that they don't even pay their employees. Those who are reaping their fields have not been paid. And these people just heap up treasure for themselves.

Now, this is, of course, obviously against what Jesus said to do. When he said, do not lay up treasure for yourselves on earth. However, Jesus didn't just give a negative there.

He didn't just say, naughty, naughty, don't lay up treasures for yourselves. He did say something else. He said, lay up treasure for yourself in heaven.

Now, in order to lay up treasure for yourself in heaven or anywhere else, you need to have some to lay up. Now, this is a very important thing to note. If Jesus had just said, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, then we might have assumed that maybe we shouldn't work a job.

Maybe we should live as poor as we can. Have very little money come into our hands and just keep away from that filthy lucre. You know, because we don't lay up any treasures for ourselves on earth.

And if that's all Jesus had said, then maybe we could justly say we should be as poor as we can and handle as little money as we can. But Jesus said, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Now, if you have something in your hand and you've got two banks, one of them says your money is much more secure here.

Than that other place. Therefore, don't lay up your money over there. Lay it up here.

Then, of course, you have a choice. You can lay up your treasure, your money, in one bank or in the other. But you can't lay it up in either if you don't have the money in the first place.

That is to say, Jesus assumes that there are some treasures in your life. Now, some people are quite rich and some are not so rich. But in any case, if you have more than what you need, you've got something that could rightly be called treasure.

If it's something that you could treasure, something you place value upon. And Jesus said, you can lay up treasures in heaven. Now, how much? How much treasures do you want to have in heaven? Well, you'll need to have some to lay up there.

They don't just appear there magically. Jesus, on several occasions, told people to lay up treasures in heaven besides this place. However, in this place, he doesn't tell us exactly how it's done.

At least if the bank said, put your money over here, it would be very clear how you'd do that. They have a deposit slip there and you can use the ATM machine or just go up to the teller and do it. And you'd know exactly what the procedure is.

But when someone says, lay up your treasures in heaven, how does one do that? How do I get my treasures from here up to God? I remember hearing a story of several Christians that were talking to each other about how they solved the matter of how much money to give to God and how much to keep for themselves. And one of them said, I draw a circle on the ground and I stand in the middle of the circle. I throw the money into the air and any money that lands in the circle, I give to God.

And any money that lands outside the circle, that's mine. And the other one says, well, I kind of do it the other way around. I stand in a circle, throw my money up, and any money that lands inside the circle is mine.

And any money that lands outside the circle belongs to God. The third guy said, well, I just throw my money up in the air and any part that God wants to keep, he can hold on to. And any part he sends back down, I consider to be mine.

It seems like that's how a lot of Christians take this scripture. Well, I'd lay up treasures in heaven, but look, God keeps sending me more here. I just can't help but lay up treasures on earth.

But you don't lay up treasures in heaven by throwing your money up into the sky. There are instructions from Christ on exactly how it is that we do lay up our treasures in heaven. If you would look, for example, at Matthew 19, we have Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler, who was probably very much like many church people in America today, rich and religious.

And yet Jesus said, you lack something. And Jesus spoke to him in this wise. In Matthew 19 and verse 21, Jesus 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. Now notice this.

This man was rich. He had laid up treasures for himself on earth. Jesus said, what you're going to do is sell that and give it to the poor.

And then you'll have riches in heaven. Okay, how did this man's riches get from earth to heaven? He gave them, he was to give them to the poor. Now this man didn't actually do what Jesus said.

He neglected it. But Jesus gave him the instructions. Here's how you lay up treasures in heaven.

You take what you have on earth and you give it to the poor, to the needy. You see, in the book of Proverbs, it says that whoever has pity on the poor lends to the Lord. That if you help the poor, you are helping Christ.

Because you might remember Jesus in Matthew 25 said that there will be many on the day of judgment that he will say, You know, I was hungry and you fed me. I was naked and you clothed me. I was homeless and you took me in.

And they'll say, When did we see you homeless? Or when did we see you naked or hungry and do these things for you? And he'll say, Inasmuch as you did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. So you see a hungry person, a hungry Christian, because Jesus said, My brethren, and his brethren are the Christians. You see a Christian in need and you feed him.

You have just fed Jesus. You see a Christian who needs money and you give him money. You have given money to Jesus.

You've laid up your treasures in heaven. That's what Jesus said to the rich young rulers. Sell what you have, give it to the poor, and you'll have treasures in heaven.

And then come follow me. Notice he didn't say you'd have treasures in heaven by coming and following me. Laying up treasures in heaven isn't, strictly speaking, a spiritual transaction.

We might think that a person gets treasures in heaven just because he follows Jesus. But Jesus said, Give your money to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and then come and follow me. Laying up your treasure in heaven is not done by following Jesus.

It is done by giving to the poor in the name of Jesus. And, of course, you'll never get to heaven to see your treasures unless you follow him, too. You send your treasures ahead of you and then you follow him so you can follow them there.

In Luke chapter 12, Jesus was talking to his disciples. In verse 33, he 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 nor moth destroys.

So we see a direct parallel here to the passage in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus said to put your treasure in heaven where it won't fail. The thieves and the moths can't

get it. But he told how to do it here in Luke 12, 33.

Sell what you have and give to the poor. Provide yourselves treasure in the heavens this way. So Jesus taught quite plainly.

The way that you get your money from its accumulated place on earth to an accumulated place in heaven is by making a deposit at your local poor person. That's how the money is given to God. That's how the money is laid up in heaven for you.

Now, let me just comment on that, if I might, because a person might just assume then that they should take all that they have and just go write a check and give it to the first beggar they see on the street. And that is not necessarily following biblical principle. You see, even though the Bible indicates that God wants us to be generous to the poor and to help those in need, the Bible does lay out various priorities.

The money that we have is not ours. It is God's. And we are stewards of his money.

And therefore, we need to manage his money in the way that accords with his principles and his priorities. Because we will have to answer to him someday for how we did so. Well, what are God's priorities? Well, we've already pointed out that the poor are a great priority of his.

And to help the poor is something God wants us to do. But we should point out also that not all the poor are equally needy. Because some people who are poor may be poor because they refuse to do what it would take to be responsible and to carry their own weight.

So that Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 3 that if a man does not work, neither should he eat. That's 2 Thessalonians 3.10. In other words, there may be people who are poor because of their own life choices. And if that is the case, God is more concerned about their life choices than he is about their economic state.

Now that may be the opposite of the way we think these days. A lot of times we think that you see someone poor, the obvious first order business is to help them to not be poor. Give them some money.

But God is concerned about their soul. God is concerned about the choices they make in life. And if a person is living irresponsibly, if a person is living in such a way as to become a parasite on society, although that person has the ability to go out and do something productive and help other people, then that is a moral flaw in that person's life.

You know, Paul addressed in Ephesians 4, Paul addressed people who had formerly been thieves. In other words, they had lived off of other people's wealth without working. And he gives them instructions about how their life is to be different.

And in Ephesians 4, 28, Paul says, Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands in what is good, that he may have something to give to him who has need. Notice this man that is addressed was a thief. He lived off of the wealth that other people earned before.

But now he's told to go out and get a job, labor faithfully with his hands, so that he'll have something not only to provide for his own needs, but that he can give to others who have need. You see, if you are able-bodied and can work, then you can not only provide your own needs, you can provide needs for others who can't. There are people who are aged.

There are people who are sick. There are people who are mentally defective or have some other problems so that they simply are not in a position to provide for themselves to work. If you can work, then God expects you to be laying up treasures in heaven by working, earning, and giving.

That's what Paul exhorted there. He gave a similar exhortation to people who had not been thieves before. In 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 4, 9, But concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I should write to you.

For you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. And he says, I exhort you to aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, to work with your own hands as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing. Now, Paul told them to continue in brotherly love, and part of that was working with your hands.

You see, ever since the fall, food has come by hard work. That's what God told Adam, in the sweat of your face you shall eat your bread. Food doesn't just spring from the ground without somebody working hard for it.

And everybody eats food, but not everyone works. They should. But if you eat food, but you're not working, then you are eating food that somebody else had to work for you to eat.

Now, is that loving? Or would it be more loving for you to do the work that would make it possible for you to feed yourself and to feed others who can't work for themselves? Obviously, brotherly love would lead you to work so that you wouldn't have to be a burden on other people, if you can work. Of course, you may be handicapped in a way that you can't work. But the point is, if a person refuses to work, he is not walking in love.

And working with one's hands, being diligent, using one's time in a way that can produce income is actually part of what it takes to lay up treasures in heaven. Because you need to, rather than being on the take, you need to be on the giving end. If you're going to lay

up treasures in heaven, you do so by giving to the poor.

If you are poor yourself, but you're only poor because you will not work, you are not legitimately poor. And the church should not support you, and other Christians should not support you in your condition. Not because your needs are not important, but because your life choices are sinful.

And it is not the place of Christians to support you and sponsor your sinful choice of laziness. If you can work, you should work. And when it comes to giving to the poor, not all poor are equal, because some poor don't need to be.

Some people are poor because of life choices. They waste their money on drugs or alcohol. Or they waste their money in other ways.

They're living beyond their means. They may be working, but they spend too much. They go deeply into debt instead of being content to live with food and raiment, like Paul said to do.

And so there are many reasons why a person may be poor without being legitimately poor. Those who are legitimately poor are those who simply cannot provide for themselves. They simply have no opportunity.

In the Bible times, the beggars were usually those who were lame or blind, or otherwise incapable of doing any work to support themselves. So when we give to the poor, we need to remember that you don't just go out and write a check to the first poor person you see. Stewardship of God's money requires responsible giving, and responsible giving is the management of somebody else's money, God's.

And He only gives you so much to use, and therefore you should probably do a bit of research if you can. Somebody asked me for money recently, and I would have gladly given it to them, except I knew some things about their life choices they were making. I knew they were poor because they were trying to live beyond their means, and because they were wasteful of their money, and they didn't really have a desperate need even now.

They just wanted more money because they wanted to keep living at their present standard of living, which was not necessary. And I simply wouldn't give it to them, because it's not because I don't love them. It's because the Bible says if a person doesn't work, he shouldn't eat, and the basic idea is that if you don't take responsibility for your own income when you can, then you are living irresponsibly, and it's not the place of the church to sponsor that lifestyle, or of individual Christians.

But if you know of individuals who are poor for the following reasons. One, they are suffering persecution in foreign countries, and maybe they've been driven from their homes. Maybe they can't farm.

Maybe they were farmers, and they were driven from their farms by persecution. That happened in many parts of the world right now to Christians. Certainly, supporting them would be a big priority, I would think.

Or, somebody is disabled, and there's no way that they can support themselves. That's another legitimate poor situation to help with. Another would be if a person has gone as a missionary, and they're living on a foreign field where they can't work there.

It may be they can't work because they're too busy doing the work of God, or it may be because they are in a country that won't allow them to work, but they are working the Lord's work there in a foreign country. Then they will be poor unless they are supported, so your support to them is certainly laying up treasures in heaven. Or even, for that matter, your pastor, or other people here in this part of the world.

People who are working full-time in the work of God, and therefore they can't go out and get another kind of job without neglecting the ministry God's given them. In such cases, of course, they need to be supported too. So the Bible does give some instructions as to how to lay up treasures in heaven.

You do so by putting your money into the things that are God's concerns. Investing in the kingdom of God. Helping those who are legitimately poor.

Helping those who are full-time in missionary work or ministry. Because as full-time workers in the ministry, they obviously are not at liberty to go out and get a job to support themselves. This, of course, sometimes needs to be evaluated too.

Sometimes people put themselves into full-time ministry when God hasn't, and they want everyone to support them. It takes wisdom to be an investor of God's money, but that's exactly what we are. That's what Jesus is teaching us when he says, Don't lay up our money on earth for ourselves, but lay it up in heaven.

We do this by putting it into God's interests in the kingdom of God. We'll continue talking about this passage next time when we come back.