

## Who Is Our Master?

By Santiago Lange

In Matthew 6:19-21 we read: **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon 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 destroy, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”.**



When Jesus exhorted us not to lay up for ourselves treasures upon earth, He used an interesting play upon words in the Greek. “Lay up” translates the Greek word *thesaurizo*. “Treasures” translates the Greek word *thesauros*. So, we might translate this phrase as, “do not treasure up treasures for yourselves on earth.” The idea here is that we often give our time and energy for the purpose of amassing things. And the reason why we spend our lives in this endeavor is because our desire is for these things. Material things hold our allegiance.

Somehow, we tend to believe that if we have enough goods we will be happy. But does money and social position really satisfy the human heart?

Christina Onassis, during her time one of the richest women in the world, died at the young age of thirty-seven. Her step-sister Henrietta Gelber, said of Christina that “she was one of those people who would never be happy. She would become impatient. It had all come too easily - all the money, houses all over the world, few real responsibilities. She lacked a sense of achievement. What she was striving for was virtually impossible in her situation. She had houses all over the world, but she never really had a home.” Christina Onassis admitted herself that “happiness is not based on money”. Then she went on to point out that the best proof of that was her own family!

Jesus knew that money would never really satisfy. That is why He warned us not to store up material possessions for this life. He saw clearly that material possessions were, at best, temporary. In Jesus’ day one of the marks of prosperity was fine clothing. The best clothing was made of wool, and often golden thread would be woven into the fabric itself. So, when Jesus spoke of the moth, everyone listening to Him knew that moths love to eat fine woolen clothing. Many of these rich people would work hard to procure this fine clothing and then have to work equally hard to protect it.

Of course, any treasure can be stolen. Thieves have always been able to break in and steal. So, Jesus pointed out that the hazard of amassing material possessions in this life is that they don't last. They are a constant worry to us. Our lives are spent in maintaining them and protecting them. Jesus also gives us an alternative. He tells us that the alternative is to lay up for ourselves treasures “in heaven”. If we invest in eternity, we invest where there is absolute security. If

our treasures are invested "in heaven", then they will neither be consumed nor stolen. Someone found the following inscribed on a tombstone: "What I spent, I lost; what I saved, I left; what I gave, I have."

The most powerful observation of God concerning our treasure in Matthew chapter 6 is found in verse 21. He indicates that where our treasure is, there will our heart be also. In other words, where we invest our treasure will determine where we set our affections. It is not so much that our treasure follows our hearts as it is that our hearts follow our treasure. In other words, what we invest in we are committed to.

Related to the attitude of our heart is the focus of our vision. What we need is a clear vision of Jesus Christ as our Lord. This, of course, relates directly to the way we look at and use our money. That is the context of Jesus' teaching. If we are focused on Christ then we will use what He has placed in our hands for His purposes. But if we are focused on ourselves, then we will become greedy and self-indulgent.

**"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and man".** (Matthew 6:24)

Not only must we be clear about our treasure and clear about our focus, we also must be clear about our God. We simply cannot serve two masters. The word translated as "masters" refers to a slave owner with absolute control over his slaves. So, when Jesus referred to a master, He was referring to the one who holds absolute authority over our lives. Whoever is in control is our master. "God" is whatever or whoever we serve. The most important thing in our life, that is our "God". If money is the most important thing, then money is our "God". If a person is the most important thing, then that person is our "God".

Again, Jesus points out that it is impossible to serve two masters. The choice is between God and mammon. You can serve one or the other, but not both. John Calvin said, **"Where riches hold the dominion of the heart, God has lost His authority."** (John Calvin [2013] "Commentary on Luke", p. 389, Ravenio Books).

It all comes back to the question of the allegiance of our heart. Who do we serve? Is our heart toward God? Is our focus upon Him? Is our "master" money or the Lord? Money talks! What does it SAY about us? □