

On March 9, 1987, the Irish Band we know as U2, released an album that catapulted them to worldwide renown—it was entitled *The Joshua Tree*. And while there were many hit songs on that album, I believe that one song, above all others, captured the heart cry of the Western World. It's title was, *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*.

This song gave voice to the longing for something more, for something other. It's a song about searching for something that will satisfy—it's a song about what we pursue, about what we treasure. For those of you who know this song, I want you to hear it in light of a story Jesus told about the Kingdom. Jesus said, "*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*"¹

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven—a God-directed life—to a treasure hidden in a field. The man who found this treasure went out and joyfully sold *everything* he had in order to buy the field and gain the treasure. This makes the man either a gambler or an investor—a fool or an expert. Which is it?

The man in Jesus' story didn't hesitate, he didn't need to think it over. Selling everything he had wasn't a sacrifice; from his perspective, gaining the treasure (a God-directed life) was a serious upgrade. I've heard it said that one person's treasure is another person's junk—it's just as true of garage sales as it is of life in God's kingdom.

¹ Matthew 13:44.

Making Jesus your treasure, is it foolish, or, is He the only One, the only thing, worth pursuing? Jesus is speaking today, addressing us at the level of desire. He asks, "*have you found what you're looking for?*" And here's a question worth considering, "*if you don't know what you're looking for, how will you know when you've found it?*"

Too many people never commit to Jesus full-time; they want to keep their options open, they want to embrace a "Jesus and" strategy: Jesus and safety, Jesus and success, Jesus and influence, Jesus and affluence. It doesn't work. We cannot pursue Jesus part-time, when we've got time or when we "feel" like it.

Some of the most miserable people I know are Christians who can't make up their minds. They want to follow Jesus and pursue everything else as well. Again, it doesn't work. Before long choices must be made, priorities must be established—*which pursuits will receive the best of our time, discipline, and passion?*

I've entitled my message this morning *Kingdom Economics*," and the title might surprise some of you. After all, isn't Jesus more interested in the "spiritual" aspects of our lives? And isn't the Bible ambiguous—and perhaps even ambivalent—about money, possessions, and economics? Perhaps you've always thought that what you do with your money is a private, individual matter. No serious reading of the Scripture could lead to these conclusions. Financial giving is personal and individual, but it isn't private.

A great leader isn't afraid to tell their people what they don't want to hear; this was a part of Jesus' greatness as a leader. Whether Jesus

was addressing sexual desire, forgiving enemies, or our relationship with money, He always drilled down to the heart of the matter. In His day, Jesus spoke about the issue of economics more than any other social issue. And Jesus' words, along with the rest of the Bible's teaching, challenges many, if not most, of our Western economic values.

So prepare to be stretched by Jesus this morning. Prepare to have your assumptions and values questioned. Prepare to receive Jesus' words, knowing that He might ask you to change the way you think and act.

At this time let's turn our attention once more to Jesus and His *Sermon*; I will be reading from Matthew 6:19-24.

“19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 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!

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.”

Jesus' teaching is easy to understand but much harder to live. I am going to address “what” Jesus said but I want to spend more time talking about the implication of His words.

As I begin, I want to draw your attention to the pattern inherent in His teaching. He talks about two treasures, two eyes, and two masters, and while the metaphor changes, Jesus' essential point remains the same: *our heart attachments will determine who we become*. Let's walk through each Jesus' 3 metaphors, beginning with the *two treasures*.

Two Treasures: every human being is a treasure seeker; it's not a deficiency, it's the way God has made us. “*But,*” says Jesus, “*what you seek will determine who you become.*” And so, Jesus tells us to seek treasure that will last.

It sounds simple enough doesn't it? We are smart enough to realize that Jesus' words make an awful lot of sense—the stuff of life does wear out, it can break down, or be stolen. But the problem is that we have taken Jesus' words and misapplied them. Jesus' warning was meant to get us to set our hearts on different treasure, on that which cannot wear out, break down, or be stolen. Instead, we've decided to chase after these temporary treasures and make them last as long as possible.

Let me offer one example, and if you happen to work in the insurance industry, please forgive me for any unintended slight. The insurance industry is built upon the premise that we can protect what is temporary, unstable, and unpredictable. Reading between the lines, insurance companies tell us: “*Go ahead...attach yourself to*

temporary things—we've got your back—and for a small fee we can replace whatever wears out, breaks down, or can be stolen."

It's staggering really, the lengths to which we go in order to protect what doesn't last. Car insurance, house insurance (flood, fire, theft, earthquake, etc), mortgage insurance, health insurance, short-term disability insurance, long-term disability insurance, employment insurance, life insurance, liability insurance, etc. I read online that female supermodel Heidi Klum took out an insurance policy on her legs—and, that her right leg is valued at \$1.2 million, while the left leg is only valued at \$1 million, thanks to a scar on her left knee.

Have we taken things too far? Are we are trying to protect the un-protectable? Are we trying to make secure things that will always be insecure? Even legs get old, they wear out, and *gasp*, they become wrinkly. Jesus doesn't tell us to stop seeking treasure, He tells us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven—treasure that will last. Let's turn our attention to His next metaphor: *two eyes*.

Two Eyes: every human being—even one who is blind— is a person of vision; it's the way God has made us. "But," says Jesus, "*what you set your gaze upon will determine who you become.*"

Jesus' metaphor was a common one in the ancient world; the eye was understood to be a kind of window into the soul. The basic idea was that what you gaze upon reveals what you desire. Jesus is asking, "*are your desires healthy or unhealthy? Is your gaze drawing you towards the light—Godwards—or is your gaze drawing you towards darkness—away from God?*"²

While Jesus uses the words "healthy" and "unhealthy" in reference to our desires, these two words can be alternately translated "generous" and "stingy". And so what appears to be a general reference to heart attachments turns out to be a pointed reference to our attitudes and desires surrounding money and possessions--there are kingdom economics in play.

And if there is some doubt as to whether Jesus is addressing our relationship to money and possessions, His next metaphor tackles this relationship directly.

Two Masters: the great American theologian, Bob Dylan, once sang what the Bible makes plain: *you gotta serve somebody*. Every human being will serve someone or something; it's the way God has made us. "But," says Jesus, "*what you serve will determine who you become.*" The implicit question Jesus asks is, "*will you serve God, or will you serve money?*"

Actually, what our English Bibles translate as "money" is literally translated as "mammon," which means, "*that in which we trust*". Mammon is anyone or anything, other than God, in which we place our security.

Did you see what Jesus is doing here? Until this point, Jesus has been speaking generally about heart attachments, but in a heartbeat He gets specific, naming money (mammon) as a rival master. The question is, *why this particular rival?* Is it not because Jesus knew how quickly the human heart sets its hope upon money and

² Scot McKnight, *The Story Of God Commentary: Sermon On The Mount*, 208.

possessions? Is it not because money can quickly become a rival god?

Jesus' teaching aligns with the rest of Scripture. Commandments 1 and 10 of the Ten Commandments set the stage: "*You shall have no other gods before me;*" and, "*No lusting after your neighbor's house—or wife or servant or maid or ox or donkey. Don't set your heart on anything that is your neighbour's.*" Psalm 62:10 says, "*though your riches increase, do not set your heart on them.*" Proverbs 11:28 says, "*Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.*"

In Matthew 13, Jesus compares God's work in our lives to a farmer's work in planting seeds. A seed that falls on rocky soil get snatched up by the birds. A seed that falls on shallow soil grows quickly but doesn't last—it's got no roots. A seed that falls in thorny soil grows, but before long, the thorns choke out it's life. And when asked to explain further, Jesus said, *The seed among thorns refers to the person who hears my invitation into a God-directed life, but all the worries and distractions, including the empty pursuit of wealth, make a God-directed life impossible.*

1 Timothy 6:10 says, "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*"

Two Treasures. Two Eyes. Two Masters. What we treasure will shape us. What we gaze upon will shape us. What we serve will shape us. *Our heart attachments will determine who we become.*

Implications: in the time remaining I want to offer three implications from Jesus' words, and I pray that God will give us ears to hear.

1. First, what we treasure, gaze upon, and serve matters—life is at stake.

Our heart is bound to our treasures—we are shaped by what we pursue, we become like what we worship. The question is: *who are we becoming?* We have been entrusted with our life—*how are we spending it? What are we spending it upon?* Are our desires and pursuits, our words, actions, and relationships, our bank accounts and our investments, submitted to Jesus the Master? *Are we becoming like Him? And if not, why not?*

We don't often think about who we are becoming; we live unaware of the shaping power of our pursuits. But let's not fool ourselves—we don't need to be kneeling, clasping our hands in prayer, or singing songs of praise in order to be engaged in worship. If you are thinking about something (or someone) all the time, if you have set your hope upon something (or someone), if you want something so bad you can taste it—you have crossed over into the realm of worship.

This is why money and possessions so easily become a rival god. I want to make it clear that Jesus does not condemn money itself, either having it, spending it, or running a business for profit—what Jesus takes issue with is our heart attachments. How easy it is to set our hearts upon something we want, or to put our trust in something other than God to save us, satisfy us, and make us feel secure.

The reason we tend to resist Jesus' words about treasure is that they confront our desire for a life of affluence—a life that does not require us to trust, submit, and depend on God. Here's the second implication...

2. There are times when we will need to choose between the present and future—between the momentary and the eternal.

One of the wisest things any human being can do is to embrace the gift of limits...we cannot do it all, see it all, or have it all. We know this inherently, and so, each of us prioritizes our pursuits and activities.

illus: I can't pinpoint exactly when it happened, but in recent years, the term "bucket list" has become a common phrase. A "bucket list" is a list of the things you want to do, see, have, or experience before you "kick the bucket" (before you die). *If you were to craft a bucket list, what would be on it?*

Probably most of us could sit down, and in a minute or two, and add 10-20 items to a bucket list, but most of them would be relatively shallow. Personally, I'd like to spend a summer in Switzerland, become proficient at surfing, watch Manchester United play at Old Trafford, and I'd love to write a few books. And on my list goes.

But if we read over our initial bucket list, most of us would conclude that the items on it were largely oriented around the present, and, the pleasure derived from them would be momentary. On one hand, there's nothing wrong with living for what is present and momentary, because life is about what is here and now, but then, life isn't just about the here and now, is it?

If we take the Bible seriously, we know that life doesn't end with our final breath—there is an eternity that awaits. What that means is that life isn't just about the here and now, it's also about there and then. The question is, *are you living in light of eternity? Is the life of heaven—life as it will one day be—affecting your life here on earth?*

I said earlier that every human being is a treasure seeker; it's the way God has made us. Jesus was addressing the tendency to put our hope in things that can be bought, but do not last, and cannot satisfy. Every car I purchase will break down one day. Every electronic gadget I buy will become obsolete within a few years. Eventually, the clothes I wear will no longer fit, or, no longer be fashionable. And so, Jesus says, *"be wise—pursue treasure that will translate into eternity."*

If you've got a bucket list, don't throw it in the trash, but by all means, include the things that translate into eternity. For example:

- *I want to prioritize the pursuit of Jesus above all pursuits.*
- *I want to proclaim and demonstrate the Kingdom of God, everywhere I go.*
- *I want to give financially, generously, sacrificially, joyfully—I want to invest my time, my talents, and my money in things and people that will last for eternity.*

In a little book entitled, *The Treasure Principle*, Randy Alcorn writes, "We'll each part with our money. The only question is when. We have no choice but to part with it later. But we do have a choice whether to part with it *now*. We can keep earthly treasures for the moment, and we may derive some temporary pleasure from them.

But if we give them away, we'll enjoy eternal treasures that will never be taken from us."³

Are you investing in eternity? Or are you adding to your collection of things that break down, wear out, and get used up? Kent Newburn once said, "True giving...does not subtract from what we have, it multiplies the effect we have in the world." Let's move on to a final implication of Jesus' words...

3. If you want to orient your life around Jesus, certain attachments will need to be broken and replaced.

In the history of the world, has there ever been a culture quite like ours, with our insane attachment to things? We "have to have" what we do not need, and we "need" things we don't even enjoy. For many people, Christians included, money can become a counterfeit god—promising satisfaction, joy, and peace, but offering nothing of the kind.

illus: The story is told of John Wesley, the famous evangelist, being given a tour of a vast estate; he rode on horseback with the owner for more than an hour but only saw a portion of the property, so great was its size. Over dinner, the owner asked him, "Well, Mr. Wesley, what do you think?" Wesley replied, "I think you're going to have a hard time leaving all this." The truth of the matter is that whether we have a lot or next to nothing, money can have a hold on our hearts.

³ Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle*, 49.

⁴ Alcorn, 13.

⁵ Herbert Lockyer, *All The Teachings of Jesus*, 135.

Does everyone know the game called "Monopoly"? It's a game of acquisitions—the goal is to make money, buy properties, put hotels on the properties, and charge the other players enormous amounts of rent every time they land on your property. The game is won when all the players, save one, have gone bankrupt—the victor is crowned real estate baron, with more land and money that they know what to do with.

And do you know what happens at the end of the game? Everything goes back in the box—all the money, hotels, properties—and there it waits for the next round of players looking to strike it rich. So it is with life: the one who dies with the most toys still dies, and everything goes back in the box—you can't take it with you. Randy Alcorn writes, "Either it leaves us while we live, or we leave it when we die. No exceptions."⁴

It's been said that "*Money is a good servant but a cruel master.*"⁵ And financial giving, like no other activity, breaks the hold money can have on our heart. Every time you give financially—though you may not be aware of it—you are making a statement: "*money will not be my god, money will not be my hope, my security, or my pursuit...I will not seek you, follow you, or give my heart to you. Instead, I will use you, invest you, and release you according to Jesus' direction.*"

Giving breaks the power of money, demoting it from the status of "god" to a "resource" to be used in pursuit of God's kingdom. Jesus'

call isn't to poverty, but to greater simplicity and generosity. He calls us to be content with "enough" instead of constantly pursuing "more." Yes, Jesus wants your heart, but He also wants your wallet; He knows just how closely the two can be tied.

Let me speak practically for a few moments about financial giving, because it's not something that many of us grew up with. The Old Testament taught the "*tithing principle*." A "tithe" meant a "tenth;" and God's people were instructed to give back to God the first 10% of their crops or income—it was an act of thanksgiving, but it also served the practical purpose of providing the temple with the resources necessary for the worship of God.

The New Testament authors grew up on this tithing principle, but rarely mention it. Instead, they tell us, "*be generous*": give generously (more than the tithe), give joyfully (because God is a joyful Giver), give sacrificially (because God has given us all things, especially the gift of His Son, Jesus).

Whatever your relationship is towards money, I'd like to encourage you to take a step in your financial giving. If this has never been a part of your life before, let me encourage you to begin with a small step—it may be a small amount or a small percentage of your annual income. I began this practice when I was young child and had no expenses...I got used to giving the first 10% to God, and found that the 90% was always more than enough.

If you are just beginning to give, set a goal of 1-3% and begin to trust God in your giving. If you are a seasoned giver, consider increasing your percentage—this is something that Naomi and I practice; we give beyond 10%, asking the Lord to direct how much we give and

where we direct our giving. For Naomi and I, it has always been important that the more we have, the greater the percentage we give...the Bible teaches proportionate giving. Those who have little give in proportion to what they have and those who have much can give much, much, more.

Giving generously rarely has to do with having so much money that we have a huge surplus from which to give. We create room for generosity when we do not require much to live on. When we scale back our lifestyle, in order to give more, we are approaching something like generosity.

Our heart attachments will determine who we become. What is your heart attached to? Who are you becoming?

Make money your treasure and you will lose out on a God-directed life in the here and now, and, treasure in heaven in the future. But make Jesus, and His kingdom, your treasure and you will find life, peace, and satisfaction that will last for eternity.

Pray