

What is Your Aim in Life? Matthew 6:19-24

As Jesus preached this Sermon on the Mount he was laying out a vision for people like us to see what life is like in the kingdom of heaven. He first addressed what our calling and purpose must be – to be salt and light to the world around us. He addressed what our righteousness must be – not just external religious activity like the scribes and Pharisees, but inward transformation that effects every part of our lives. He addressed what our motivation must be – not the praise and admiration of man like the hypocrites, but the joy of glorifying and praising our heavenly Father. And today we will see him address what our primary aim in life must be. Again, much different than what the scribes and Pharisees were doing.

What should be our primary aim in life? What should we be living for day in and day out? What we're going to see today is that there's basically only two options for you and me to choose from. One is what God is calling us to; the other is the natural and normal way of life in the fallen world that all of us probably begin living for by default. I want to describe that way a little bit to begin with this morning.

We live in a land of abundant opportunities – opportunities to pursue and experience many different things and follow your dreams. There are limitations, but the door is pretty open for us to pursue what we want to pursue with a pretty good chance we can achieve success to some degree. We're not like slaves or peasants who are locked into a preset life of bondage and poverty. And that's a wonderful thing.

Because of these opportunities and the freedom in our culture, we are conditioned to approach life a certain way that I think is best illustrated by our high school graduation ceremonies. (Picture) Every community graduates a class of students each year and sends them out into the world. And what do we tell them? I've heard a lot of graduation speeches and they all sound pretty much the same. Whatever you want to do, go for it. You can achieve your dreams. Go as fast as you can, get as high as you can, get as much as you can, and live a life of fullness and abundance. And we all think that sounds

really great. We nod our heads when we hear those speeches. We value freedom, abundance, opportunity, wealth, and pursuing your dreams.

Having grown up in this culture, many of us have lived those kinds of lives. It's American so we think it's good; and it must be Christian. Love Jesus, love family, love country, make a lot of money, pursue your dreams. Many pastors encourage you to live that way. Get rich, be successful, strive for and enjoy the blessings God gives you and make sure you give a bunch to the church.

But I want us to pay really close attention to what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount today. You're never going to hear what he says at a normal graduation ceremony. It's not going to match up very well with what we've been conditioned to think. It's not going to match up very well with the charge to pursue the American Dream. And it might not match up very well with the way you've been living your life. And because of that, it's really something we need to wrestle with.

This is a teaching that I have wrestled with a lot the past 5 years. It has challenged me; convicted me; held me accountable; and I would say is currently changing me. And it's been a difficult process, but I am very thankful to God for it because it gives clarity and leads to life. This passage may be challenging for you as well, but if you believe what Jesus says and follow him, I believe it will bring you into a life of deeper joy and freedom.

After warning the people to avoid the sinful motivation of living to be seen by others, like the scribes and Pharisees were doing, he warned them to watch out for what they were pursuing in life.

Read Matthew 6:19-24.

¹⁹ *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys 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. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

²⁴ *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”*

As was the case with the rest of the Sermon on the Mount, I think Jesus is confronting something he saw in the lives and leadership of the scribes and Pharisees. After giving a similar message to a different crowd in which he repeated the phrase: *“You cannot serve God and money,”* it says in Luke 16:14: *“The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him.”* So they were lovers of money, and when he confronted them again later in his ministry, he said this in Matthew 23:25: *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.”*

So I think Jesus had these things in mind when he said what we’re looking at today. Because they were lovers of money and full of greed and self-indulgence Jesus could see what they were pursuing in life. They were *“laying up for themselves treasures on earth”* and teaching others to do the same. When you look up the Greek words behind this you find the idea of ongoing, intentional accumulation of more and more. The Topical Lexicon says: *“The verb (for “laying up”) denotes the intentional laying up (or amassing) of treasure, whether material or immaterial, for future use. It always carries the idea of deliberate accumulation rather than casual possession.”*

So, what I think Jesus saw was that the scribes and Pharisees were devoting their lives to the accumulation of more and more of the treasures of earth which could have included many things – material possessions, money, status, power, investments, real estate, etc. And the key problem was that they weren’t just acquiring these things; they were pursuing them as their primary aim in life. They were devoting their lives to the pursuit of these things.

And Jesus was telling his hearers that they must not live like that. He points out in verse 19 that the things they were devoting themselves to were not going to last. They would rot or deteriorate or be stolen or destroyed. They were fleeting treasures and they should not devote their lives to accumulating them.

He told a parable in a similar situation that you read about in Luke 12:15-21: *“And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* ¹⁶ *And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully,* ¹⁷ *and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’* ¹⁸ *And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.* ¹⁹ *And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.”* ²⁰ *But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’* ²¹ *So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”* He wanted more and more and more...

Jesus was very clear with his hearers that they must not live their lives devoted to the pursuit of earthly treasures. They don't last and it is foolish to set them as the aim of your life. Instead, he says, the much greater pursuit in life is to devote yourself to the accumulation of treasures in heaven because they are eternal. They're not going to corrode and deteriorate. And no one can take them away from you.

What is he talking about? I believe he is thinking of the eternal rewards we will receive both now and in heaven for faithfulness to God, devotion to Jesus, commitment to walking in his ways and carrying out his mission – using our lives and our earthly resources to love and serve people to expand his kingdom here on earth.

So Jesus is talking about two different paths of life, and the primary difference is what you devote your life to: What do you set as your primary aim and pursuit? Will it be the fleeting rewards of earth or the eternal rewards of heaven? As he goes on, he makes it very clear that we have to choose between these paths of life. And it's a choice that's really hard to make, because if we're honest with ourselves I think what we really want is to have it both ways. We want to get as much as we can out of this life right now by pursuing all the opportunities of this world that we want for ourselves and then enjoy the rewards of heaven when we die. But Jesus is very clear that it does not work that way.

He makes a statement in verse 21 that's sobering and clarifying, and hopefully convicting if you've been caught up in and obsessed with living for the things of this world like the scribes and Pharisees. After telling them to be devoted to living for the treasures of heaven and not of earth, he says, "*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*"

What does he mean by that? Some of you know exactly what he's talking about and this is the journey I've been on the last 5 years. It started when we bought some hunting land in 2021 – a good thing; a wonderful blessing from God to enjoy. I was so excited. I grew up in the country. I spent my summers in the woods with my brothers. In the fall we would all go hunting. Being in the woods and working on projects is refreshing and exciting and rejuvenating for me. And now we had the land for me to do that.

All of that desire and enjoyment was dormant and basically unrealized until we bought the land. And then, it was like it awakened a sleeping giant. The desire in me to go to the woods was powerful. I had a lot of clean up work to do and loved almost every part of it, except maybe for picking rocks. And then I started watching all these videos about how to design and build your property for better deer hunting, so that gave me a whole bunch more things to work on. I was learning a lot and trying to figure it out and I gave a lot of my attention to it.

But I started to observe some troubling things in me. I noticed that my desire to enjoy the land had become more like an obsession. I was passionate about working on the land but my passion for God and ministry was actually declining. I didn't have the same passion that I had before. At first I didn't understand what was going on and was really troubled and confused. But the answer was really quite simple: "*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" And it was happening to me. I was going down the same path as the scribes and Pharisees, just in a different way. And the effect it had on my heart was not good.

I share that with you because I think a lot of you can relate with me, whether it's the blessing of land or something else in your life. And I want to warn you

about the trap it can be. Where you treasure it, there will be your heart as well.

Jesus gives a metaphor to explain what he means: *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”* This can be difficult to understand, but when you see what he’s talking about it’s really quite simple. The eye corresponds with what you treasure most in life and the body corresponds with your heart.

Jesus says, “The eye is the lamp of the body.” Think about the effect your eyes have on your whole body. They’re like a lamp in the darkness. If your eyes are working right and are healthy and clear, they’re like a bright lamp that’s showing your body where to go. But if your eyes are cloudy and your vision is darkened or impaired, they’re like a lamp that’s running out of oil. You can’t see what’s around you and you fumble around in the darkness. The condition of your eyes has a profound effect on the condition of your body.

And what Jesus is illustrating is that whatever you treasure most in this life – whatever captures your gaze – is going to have a profound effect on your heart. If you treasure the things of this earth, and make them your focus in life, whatever that may be – money, material possessions, career, making a name for yourself, health, hobbies, entertainment, even your family and children – if any of these come first for you and what you focus on most, your heart will be devoted to the things of this world. But if you treasure the things of heaven – your relationship with God and seeking to advance his kingdom on earth, and investing your life in the spiritual growth of other people, like family, neighbors, coworkers, friends, other believers – if this is what you focus your life on, your heart will be devoted to the things of God and heaven.

So, you have to choose what kind of life you’re going to live – what you’re going to aim for and pursue. Because you can’t have it both ways. Your heart doesn’t work that way. Your heart is going to follow your treasure. Which is why Jesus says at the end: *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise*

the other. You cannot serve God and money.” And the same can be said for any earthly treasure, not just money.

Those who wish to follow Christ and belong to the kingdom of heaven must be devoted first and foremost to the things of God and laying up for themselves treasures in heaven. Because where your treasure is, there your heart will be as well. And you cannot serve two masters.

This calling for how to live your life goes contrary to our culture, our graduation speeches, and what many pastors are saying and how many Christians in America are living. But we have before us the very words of Christ himself. And it is critically important that we do not turn a blind eye or a deaf ear to these things. We do not want Jesus to tell us “Away from me, I never knew you.”

This can be a really hard truth for us to come to terms with. I’ve experienced that myself. I’ve wrestled with this and tried to understand what it means for our lives today. It brings up a lot of questions. Does this mean we can’t have savings accounts or retirement accounts or grow a business or try to have a successful career or material possessions or hunting land and hobbies? Is it even ok to be deeply in love with your spouse and devoted to your children?

How would Jesus answer these questions? I think he would say it’s ok to have these things. They are good and God has given them to you for you to enjoy. But you cannot live for them or be obsessed with them. They cannot be your passion in life. You can pursue them to a certain degree, but you must ask yourself: Are you more passionate about them than you are about God?

We have to be careful and watchful. We have to guard our hearts. We have to pay attention to how much time and attention and energy we are giving to the things of this world because it is going to affect our hearts. It already has. And we have to choose to make Christ and our relationship with him and our work to advance his kingdom our first priority. There is no other way if you want to belong to Christ’s kingdom.

Transformation of the heart isn’t going to happen overnight. It is a process of growth and change that happens through many practical steps that make an

impact on your heart. How are you spending your time? How are you spending your money? What are you giving your attention to? We need to start making practical steps and changes, because they will affect our hearts.

When Jesus said, “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,*” it wasn’t just a warning; it was also a promise. When I cut back on the time and attention I give to the land and keep it in its proper place, it’s hard at first because I’m giving up something I enjoy, but after time I can feel the effect it has on my heart and it’s always good. If you truly belong to Christ, I don’t think you’re going to feel right or be at peace until you bring your life into alignment with his will in this area. And that’s a gift from God. The things you’re pursuing will produce anxiety and angst because they will ultimately fail to deliver. But if you take the steps and make the changes to bring your life into alignment, your heart will also come into alignment and there will be peace and assurance. You will actually be able to enjoy the blessings in life and not obsess over them. So we need to set boundaries and focus more on intentionally pursuing the things of God.

What is it that has become too important to you in this world? What can you do to put it in its proper place? What can you do to revive your heart and passion for God and his kingdom? Take time to reflect and pray about these things and share how God is moving you with your small group.