

## *Of Permanent Value*

A sermon preached by Dr. John Clayton at Covenant Presbyterian Church of Fort Smith, Arkansas on September 9, 2018.

*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 eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, 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!’ 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. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “What shall we drink?” or “What shall we wear?” For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble (Matt. 6:19–34).*

As we consider this passage, let us examine ourselves in light of it. Because we live out life in this world, there is the never-ending danger of becoming like it, living for it, being defined by it. It is far too easy to become worldly. This calls for self-examination.

Are you more concerned with building your wealth in this world than the next? Do you know the condition of your finances better than the condition of your heart? Is your chief end the fulfillment of your desires? Have you found yourself enslaved to a never-ending lust for more? Do you worry about your needs and desires? Does anxiety overwhelm you to the point of perceived inability? Have your desires begun to define who you think you are? Have you become so consumed with the stuff of this world that the things of heaven seem like a distant future in a galaxy far, far away? Does your worry about tomorrow affect how you live today? The reality is that we can all answer yes to some or all of these questions in varying degrees at some point in this life.

Our sin nature, the flesh, loves to remind the Christian that while we have been justified as righteous, by God’s grace through faith in Christ, we still battle sin here and now. It is a perpetual battle, in the imperfection of our sanctification, to examine ourselves and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. How easy it is to lose our heavenly perspective, investing ourselves in worldly treasure of temporal value rather than investing our lives in heavenly treasure of permanent value. Because this is our tendency, we must actively engage in our sanctification. As we consider this passage, I want you to remember three simple phrases: lay up, cast off, and seek first. We lay up heavenly treasure; cast off worldly worry; and seek first the kingdom of God.

## **Lay up Heavenly Treasure**

Why should we lay up heavenly treasure? Heavenly treasure is of permanent value. Worldly treasure may be eaten by moths. What is the drop in value of your clothes from retail to resale? Worldly treasure may be destroyed by rust. What is the drop in value of your car from the sales floor to the scrap yard? Worldly treasure may be stolen. Worldly wealth can disappear with a thief in the night. When something is stolen it isn't just less valuable, it is gone. But heavenly treasure may not be eaten, destroyed, or stolen, but rather it is of permanent, eternal value. So, "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy and where thief do not break in and steal" (Matt. 6:20).

What is this heavenly treasure? Jesus answers this question with this truth: "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Meaning, your treasure is that which you value the most. What do you value most? Whatever it is, you can be sure that your heart will be there too. If you are in Christ, then you are a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, living in temporary exile in this earthly kingdom. Consider the foolishness of attaching your heart to something of this world. It may be eaten. It may rust. It may be stolen. The stuff of this life is temporal; it will not transfer to the next.

Citizens of the heavenly kingdom are called to be investors, so to speak investing in heavenly treasure, of permanent value. Being an investor in heavenly treasure provides a different perspective on life. As martyred missionary Jim Elliot told his wife Elizabeth, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Elliot understood the permanent value of heavenly treasure. Do you?

Understanding this perspective is significantly important, because what we value most, we focus on, and what we focus on affects us deeply. What we focus on, so to speak, is like an eye, and as Jesus said, this "eye is the lamp of the body" (Matt. 6:22a). If our focus is on the things of God, the eye is healthy. The Apostle Paul conveys this concept when he encourages us, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Phil. 4:8). And, this healthy focus fills us with light.

Show me a joyful Christian, and I will show you a Christian whose eye is focused on heavenly things. Show me an anxiety-ridden Christian, and I will show you a Christian whose eye is focused on worldly things. Paul calls the world "this present darkness" (Eph. 6:12), a graphic description that parallels Jesus' warning of our eye. Focus on "this present darkness," then we will know a consuming darkness. Your life and my life are directly affected by the eye of our spirit, seeing light or darkness. But, in Christ, we were not redeemed for darkness.

Worldliness can take you to a dark place, a place you as a child of God were never meant to go. We were redeemed to focus on, walk in, and live our lives in the light. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have

the light of life” (John 8:12). Paul reminded the church of this truth: “For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8). Because neither you nor I were redeemed for darkness, let us live in the light of our Redeemer, living as we were redeemed to live in Him. In Christ, let us lay up heavenly treasure and cast off worldly worry.

### **Cast off Worldly Worry**

Worldly worry, or anxiety, acts as a warning sign that we have become worldly, focused on the wrong things, over-valuing the stuff of moth, rust, and thief. Worldly worry, worldliness, and darkness are far more inter-connected than modern Christians want to accept. We want to label it, assign it, direct it to the clinic. There is no psychobabble in Jesus’ teaching about these human issues. Rather, Jesus reveals to us at least four things about understanding worldly worry, or anxiety.

First, anxiety is rooted in misplaced devotion. Simply put: “You cannot serve God and *mammon*” (Matt. 6:24b). As Joshua challenged the children of Israel, “choose this day whom you will serve . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh. 24:15). Maybe your heart needs to hear this, too! Second, anxiety reveals an unhealthy attachment to worldly things of fleeting value: “do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?” (Matt. 6:25). Anxiety should serve as a warning sign to the Christian of an unhealthy attachment to this world. Third, anxiety reveals a lack of faith in God and His provision: “if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?” (Matt. 6:30). Fourth, worry reveals an exaggerated concern for the unknown future and a lack of awareness of the present: “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matt. 6:34).

If this is the case, how then do we cast off worldly worry? How do we fight against anxiety? Consider these six applications. First, value your relationship with God above everything else. If you can only serve one master serve the Master! Commandment *numero uno*: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3). Second, consider the testimony of the provision of God around you. Jesus gives two examples: birds and flowers. “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” (Matt. 6:26). And, “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these” (Matt. 6:28-29).

Third, remember that worry is stupid. I mean, really, “which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?” (Matt. 6:27). Fourth, have faith in God’s provision for you, not as a bird or a flower, but as His child: “if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all

these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all” (Matt. 6:30-32). Fifth, in light of eternity, take one day at a time, because “Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matt. 6:34b). Sixth, and most importantly, because our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matt. 6:33).

### **Seek First the Kingdom**

The world seeks to contradict this admonition with its cares and concerns: If you do not focus on the things of this world, you will lose perspective, lose relevance, and maybe just become weird. Keeping with Jesus’ examples, the world says, “Obsess on your diet.” Define yourself by what you eat. Vegan, vegetarian, omnivore? We have an entire industry in this country to help us with our over-consumption of food.

If not that, then the world says, “Obsess on your appearance.” Build your image, refine your brand, stage your life for your next selfie. Strike the pose, look the part, because everyone is watching you. A message we so desperately needed today, and a message our children and grandchildren need to see in us and hear from us is that the most important thing in your life is not your diet or your appearance. It is living for Christ, His kingdom reign and His righteous rule. I firmly believe that the gospel is the cure for the childhood anxiety that children in this country are experiencing, and you are commissioned to carry it to them in word and deed.

Of course, we are so concerned about going “overboard.” We are warned in the church with that old church worker expression: “He’s so heavenly minded that he’s no earthly good.” Nothing could be further from the truth. People in the church may get so mystically weird that they lose contact with reality. People in the church may use their faith to mask their sloth and laziness. The truth is: The more heavenly-minded we become, the more earthly effective we are. When the what and how of your life is driven by the heavenly why of the gospel, then whatever you do, you will do to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Jesus says that if we live for our heavenly Father first and foremost, He will meet our needs in this life. This life matters, but it is not our focus. We have needs, but they are not our priority. Consider this truth in your work and family. How easy it is to let your work consume your focus, resulting in the worldly worry of a work-consumed life. But how liberating is work done to the glory of God. How easy it is to let your family become your master, resulting in the anxiety of worldly expectations. How freeing is a home life surrendered to the Lord.

We were redeemed for a kingdom of permanent value. So, invest your life in it. For, our Lord Jesus Christ invested His life for us. In His righteous life, He showed us a life invested fully in heavenly treasure. In His sacrificial death, He showed us the Lord’s atoning provision. In His glorious resurrection, He showed us the permanent value of eternal life in the kingdom of heaven. In Christ, let us lay up heavenly treasure, cast off worldly worry, and seek first the kingdom, for it is of permanent value.