

# The Teachings Of Jesus

## (The Sermon on the Mount)

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### **FOURTH BLOCK (6:19-34)**

#### **Living Out of a Misplaced Sense of Values**

Thus far the emphasis in this sermon has been on the contrast between moral codes and moral character. Here, the emphasis shifts to a kindred issue - the issue of values, which is essentially related to the issue of moral behavior, and ultimately, the issue of moral character.

By the expression "one's sense of values," we are talking about what is important or what is of worth or value to a person. One of the greatest deterrents to the development of moral character is selfishness (i.e., self-concern out of control). In its most basic terms we are talking about "want," or, more specifically, "I want!" Our world has almost become obsessed with "want" that is out of control. Materialism and affluence is one of Satan's greatest weapons in the conflict being played out on this earth between the forces of good and the forces of evil. It is not money or wealth *per se*, but the love of it and what it can give us: possessions, power, prestige, and pleasure. More specifically, what we are talking about is control (or lordship) over our own lives as well as the lives of others.

The rich man of Matt. 19:16-22 had great possessions, but what Jesus saw was that this man's possessions had actually taken possession of him. What was of value to him was "treasures on earth," and this devotion to wealth was reflected in the way he viewed things. He had divided his loyalties and was trying to serve two masters. Even though

he was concerned about eternal life, this concern was overshadowed by his concern for his wealth.

When Jesus told him that he must give up his enslavement to "Mammon," he walked away. What was of value to him as "treasures on earth," and his misplaced sense of values had turned him to idolatry (he had another object of devotion other than God at the center of his existence), had distorted his moral character, and had led him to a behavior wherein he turned his back on his God.

### The Problem of Materialism (6:19-21)

*Do not treasure up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but treasure 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 will be your heart also (6:19-21, author's translation).*

The concern here is not treasuring up treasure (the literal Greek reading); rather, it is treasuring up "treasures on earth." It is not a prohibition against valuing something; rather, it is a matter of what one values that is at issue. Here, Jesus is setting thisworldly concerns over against otherworldly concerns; and, from what follows throughout this block of material, it is self-concern out of control he has in mind. The reasoning behind this prohibition is expressed in the wisdom saying, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." As one scholar observes:

If the treasure is an earthly one, the person becomes lost in earthly things; if it is a heavenly one, the person lives with an orientation toward heaven; his will is not egoistically aimed toward himself, but toward God. (Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 132.)

As we have said earlier, it is a general axiom of behavior that people behave as they do because they think or believe as they do. Belief and behavior are inseparably linked together. If one believes that having

possessions will make him happy, he will try to gain possession, believing that possessing possessions will bring him happiness. This is where his values will center. This is the issue Jesus addresses in 6:19-21 of this block.

### The Problem of Seeing with Evil Eyes (6:22-23)

*The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is clear (aplous – single, not blurred), your whole body will be illuminated, 23 But if your eye evil (poneros), your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light in you is darkness, how great that darkness [is]! (6:22-23, author's translation).*

Here we are dealing with a piece of poetic imagery popular in ancient Hebrew writings, especially in rabbinic literature. The eye was the portal (lamp) through which light entered into a man. If the eye was closed or diseased, no light could enter and the soul was in darkness; hence, his reasoning would reflect that darkness.

This was true because, in Hebrew thought, what a man knew (empirical data) was what entered into him through his senses, especially his sense of sight. If a person saw things differently than everyone else, his sight was defective. If his moral reasoning was such that he saw evil and called it good, his moral enlightenment was suspect. If his sight (sense of seeing) were sound (healthy), one's thinking would be well informed; if his eye was not sound, his reasoning took place in darkness. The greater the darkness within a man, the more distorted would be his way of seeing things, and this would be evidenced by his way of seeing things.

The key to understanding what Jesus is doing' with this piece of imagery is in realizing that "the evil/dark eye" was often the result of distorted vision which was self-willed. One sees what he wishes to see and as he wishes to see. This same issue is present in the saying from Isaiah 6:9-10, quoted by Jesus (Matt 13:14-17) and Paul (Acts 28:25-27).

If one's thinking is such that he sees and interprets things in a perverted or distorted way, his behavior will consistently reflect his distorted view of things; and what is of value to him will be a by-product of his distorted way of looking at things. The way he sees things will directly influence the way he behaves; this is the issue Jesus addresses in 6:22-23.

## The Problem of Double Mindedness (6:24)

*No one can serve two masters (kuriois – lords); for either he will hate (miseo – to have ill will toward) the one and love (agapao – to have good will toward) the other, or else he will adhere (antechomai – to cling) to the one and have contempt (kataphroneo – to hold in contempt) the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon [wealth]! (6:24, author's translation).*

The word translated as "serve" here is the Greek *douleuo* meaning, "to serve as a slave, to be a slave or day laborer." The word translated "masters" is the Greek word *kurioi*, the word for "lord;" when used in reference to God; it means "lord absolute." The issue here is that of a lord-servant relationship; and the kind of servanthood under consideration is that of complete submission to the authority of the lord-figure in question. In this relationship one has completely submitted himself to the lordship of the authority figure in question. In order to submit himself to the lordship of second authority figure, he must be freed from or denounce the authority of the first. By virtue of the nature of the lord-servant relationship here under consideration, it cannot be "both/and," it must be "either/or." God is "Lord absolute," service to him cannot be shared with another lord-figure.

The two masters Jesus sets in juxtaposition here are: God and Mammon. God we know, but who is Mammon? "Mammon" is the Chaldean word meaning "wealth." It is found in rabbinic literature and in the Jewish apocalyptic writings in the sense as the personification of "wealth."

Here Jesus uses the term for the personification of wealth that has become the object of one's devotion. This is precisely what idolatry was to the Hebrews (i.e., that which displaces God as the central figure of one's devotion). Mammon is not a god any more than any of the deity figures of the ancient world were gods; wealth may be worshipped as a god, so much so that one becomes enslaved to it, and it become his master!

If one believes in the power of Mammon to make him happy, that belief will make him a slave to that master. Try as he may, he will not be able to serve another master as long as he believes his first master will best reward his service. If a man's desires are for possessions and the power, prestige, and pleasure possessions bring, the conditions of the master promising him the fulfillment of that desire are going to have priority over any other master. In fact, in this situation, there is only one master. Again, one's moral behavior becomes a direct reflection of one's sense of values [i.e., what is important to him or his thinking]. This is the issue Jesus addresses in 6:24.

### The Problem of Anxiety (6:25-30)

*Therefore, I say to you, do not be anxious about your life (pseuche – cognitive existence), what you should eat or what you should drink; nor for your body, what you should put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? 26 Look to the birds of the air, they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more worth than they? 27 Who among you by being anxious can add one cubit to the length of his life? 28 So why be anxious about clothing? Observe the lilies of the field, how they grow; they do not labor or spin 29 and yet I am saying to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these, 30 and if the grass of the field is today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more clothe you, you who are of little faith? (6:25-30, author's translation).*

The key terms of this text are not life, eat, drink, body, or clothing, which are the terms usually given most attention in teaching and preaching; rather, the term with which we are concerned is "anxious." The

Greek word is *merimnao* (*merim-NA-o*) and means, "to be anxious, to worry, to be troubled, to be concerned, to care for or about." Are we to conclude from this that Jesus is instructing us to not be concerned or to not care about our lives, what we eat or drink, our bodies (health), or our clothing? Self-concern is not the problem here; it is self-concern "out of control." In fact, in other NT writings we are instructed to be concerned (*merimnao* - anxious) for one another (1 Cor 12:25), and for the church as a whole (2 Cor 11:28; Phil 2:20).

What, then, is Jesus saying? The answer is twofold: he is speaking of concerns which are misplaced, concern for the wrong things, concerns which reflect a misplaced sense of values. In the parable of the sower, Jesus speaks of these kinds of concerns:

*... but the cares (merimna) of the world, and the delight in riches, and the desire for other things, enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful (Mark 4:19).*

Secondly, Jesus is speaking of concerns that are out of control. This is reflected in the admonition to Martha in Luke 10:40-42 as well as Matt 6:25. This is implied by the present tense verb in the Greek text. The present tense verb conveys the idea of "continuous action," something that is in the process of going on, and on, and on. This is also seen in the words of Paul in Phil 4:6, "Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God." Literally, the prohibition here is against continuous worry, worry that consumes us, that takes over our lives. To be anxious about things is a natural concern any responsible person would experience, to live one's life in a state of worry or anxiety is senseless and can lead to emotional illness. In 1 Peter 5:6ff we are told:

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. (7) Cast all your anxiety (merimna) on him because he cares for you. (8) Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:6-8).*

If one's concerns with a view to thisworldly existence (food, health, clothing, etc.) are out of control, those concerns will consume his thinking, and, consequently, control his behavior. Again, behavior is directly linked to one's sense of values. This is the issue Jesus addresses in 6:25-30.

### Seeking First the Reign Of God (6:31-34)

*Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'With what will we clothe ourselves?'" 32 For all these things are the nations/gentiles zealous. Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things, 33 but seeking (zeteite – present, indicative, active of zateo – to be seeking, being zealous) first the reign (basileia – the rule/reign) of God and his righteousness, all these things shall be added (prostithemi – to be placed before, one after the other) to you. 34 Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is the evil of that day (6:31-34, author's translation).*

The solution to the problem of a misplaced sense of values is to center one's values in the reign of God and in his righteousness (6:33). "Reign" rather than "kingdom" is the primary meaning of the Greek term *basileia*. It is most unfortunate that Tyndale's English translation of 1526 rendered the Greek term *basileia* as "kingdom," following the Roman Catholic doctrine that the kingdom of God is "the church" from which derived the concept of the Roman Church as the Holy Roman Empire.

The primary meaning of *basileia* is "rule" or "reign" and this translation would have made these words of Jesus much more intelligible. "Seek the reign of God rather than the reign of self," is what Jesus is saying here. Further, the use of the Greek present tense here is significant; Jesus is speaking of "continuously" seeking first the reign or rule of God and his righteousness. Our lives are to be a manifestation of the reign of God. When this is the case, the world will not reign in us.

One may argue that that this was the core teaching of Jesus'

ministry. One author takes the view that “the kingdom of God is at hand” was *The secret message of Jesus*, as his book is titled. He makes an excellent case that this was the message that stood at the heart of Jesus’ preaching and this message has been lost in the preaching and practice of the Christianity of the present day. There is a twofold sense of the *basileia tou theou* (the reign/kingdom of God) in NT usage; especially in the usage of Jesus. The first usage of the expression *baseleia tou theou* is for the eschatological reign of God which will come at the endtime following the second coming of Christ, the resurrection, judgment, and the consummation of eternal life for those “in Christ.” The second usage is the most prominent in the teaching of Jesus; the *basileia tou theou* is the rule of God as a moral force reigning within man as a being created in the image of God. When asked about when the *basileia tou theou* of which Jesus spoke would appear he answered, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you,” (Luke 17:20-21). The Greek text here does literally say, “the *basileia tou theou* is within you,” rather than, “among you,” which reinforces the argument being made here. It is the moral reign of God in the life of the one created in the image of God that God is reclaiming through Jesus’ proclamation that the *basileia* was coming, near, or at hand. This is the sense in which the *basileia tou theou* is the moral rule of God that struggle for conquest until man has fit himself for eternity, the moral rule of God in the endtime.

Throughout this block of material Jesus addresses the problems associated with living out of a misplaced sense of values, and the influence of one's sense of values on their moral behavior. The comments of 6:31-34, flow directly out of verses 25-30, and, here, Jesus gives the solution to the problem of living out of a misplaced sense of values: seek first the reign or rule of God and his righteousness (i.e., otherworldly concerns), and all the concerns of this worldly existence will fall into proper perspective with the realization that all things of the this worldly realm that have been created for our good are under God's control.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What do you understand by the expression, "one's sense of values"? How does our sense of values relate to (1) our beliefs, our moral character, and (3) our moral behavior?
2. Discuss the parallels between the rich man of Matt 19:16-22 and the teachings of Jesus in this block of material (6:19-34).
3. Is there anything wrong with treasuring something of value? What is Jesus talking about here in Matt 6:19?
4. How do you understand the expression, "treasures in heaven"? What might this kind of treasure be?
5. Discuss the expression, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." What has this to do with our sense of values?
6. How do you understand the expression, "The eye is the lamp of the body" (6:22)? What does this expression have to do with moral character, moral behavior, and one's sense of values?
7. Who is "Mammon" and what does he have to do with our sense of values? Why can one not serve two lords?
8. Should one ever be anxious, worried, or concerned about anything? What is Jesus saying here about anxiety?
9. How do you understand the expression "reign of God" and what has his reign to do with "his righteousness"?
10. How is Jesus' admonition to seek first the kingdom and righteousness a solution to the problem of a misplaced sense of values?

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