

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **Overcoming Materialism**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 2247

Look with me at Matthew chapter 6 in your Bible, and we're going to look again at the lessons the Lord has for us in this section of Matthew's gospel, which is known as the sermon on the mount. I have to confess something to you at this point. We've been in the sermon on the mount a long time and there, I suppose, is some reason for that. From the time that I first entered seminary in 1961, I've always had in my heart a tremendous desire to understand the sermon on the mount. I had heard differing interpretations of it, and how it fit, and where it belonged, and what its purposes were, and I never seemed to be able to satisfy my own mind.

And through the days of seminary I found my thinking unfulfilled in terms of understanding it, and I have allowed these years in between to go by without really ever getting into an exhaustive study of the sermon on the mount. And this has haunted me for all these years because I believe it is the most significant single statement of Christ on the substance of His message to the world.

It demands priority attention, and because so many years have intervened, I may be lingering a little long, but I'm filling up a gap of a lot of longings over a great period of time. So I trust that you'll indulge me if we deal with it as we do. And even then, I must admit that I only give you about one tenth of what I have in me to say, because the riches of this are just inexhaustible.

With that in mind, let me call your attention to Matthew 6:25, and reading down through verse 34 give you the setting for the next passage that we'll be discussing in this message of our Lord.

"Therefore I say unto you, be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than food, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye anxious for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

"And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore be not anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, With what shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye

first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

“Be therefore not anxious about tomorrow: for tomorrow will be anxious for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is its own evil.”

Now this is a tremendous passage, and it'll form the study for the next few weeks. Because of its depth and its richness, we want to glean all that we can from it. It is added to a prior passage which I also want to read in order for it to have a full context. In verse 19, you'll remember our Lord said, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

“The lamp of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be healthy, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and money.”

Now you'll notice in both of those passages that we're dealing with physical commodities, material possessions. In the first, we're talking about money from verses 19 to 24, or as we said, luxury, how we deal with luxury. In the second, verses 25 to 34, we're talking about necessity: What we eat, what we drink, and what we wear.

You might say that the first portion is directed more at the rich, who tend to take their luxury and stockpile it for their own ends. And the second is directed more at the poor, who tend to because of their poverty and their lack of substance question or doubt God or live in fear and anxiety over whether they're going to have enough to eat, and drink, and wear.

Now, being rich has its problems and being poor has its, as well. The temptation to the rich is to trust in his riches, and the temptation to the poor is to doubt God's provision. But the Lord is saying in both cases, “I have a perspective for you. Whether you're rich or poor, your focus is to be on Me.”

For example, in verse 21 He says, “Put your treasure in heaven because that's where I want your heart.” And in verse 33 He says, “Seek first the kingdom - ” in other words, the same thing, “Put your heart again in heaven, and don't worry, I'll give you all the rest.” The point is I want you to have a focus.

Now the world's focus if it's rich is to lay up treasures on earth, verse 19. The world's focus if it's poor, in verse 32, is to seek after what it'll eat, and seek after what it'll drink, and seek after with what it will

be clothed. But you, if you're rich, you pursue heavenly investment; if you're poor, you pursue the kingdom of God. In other words, when it comes to money and possessions, our focus is on God not on those possessions. We are not grasping and clawing after things. We are rather seeking God and allowing God to fulfill His promises and His provisions for us.

Now with that as an overview, I want to give you just an introduction to the second section that really acts as a transition between the two. And we won't specifically get into any particular verses until next time. Managing money and managing possessions is a severe problem for all of us, and we're all very aware of it. Now we all have differing amounts of money. All of us make differing amounts of money, and that is by God's design. But we all have the same problem of what we do with it, how we invest it, how we spend it, how we use it, and we have to constantly face the fact that money provides for us - mark this - a test of true spirituality.

In fact, if you ask me, it's the best test there is. I can tell you more about a man or a woman spiritually by how they handle their physical properties than just about any other thing. It is a great revealer of the heart. It is a major problem in life. And when somebody can deal with it, it manifests the strength of real spiritual life.

For a little illustration I would put it this way. The Lord gave 38 parables in the gospels. Out of those 38, 16 of them have to do with how we handle our money. That's a major emphasis. Christ, for example, said more about money and possessions than about heaven and hell combined. In the gospels, 1 out of every 10 verses - 1 out of every 10 verses - deals with money or possessions; 288 verses in the 4 gospels. In the Bible, there are 500 plus references to prayer, there are 500 minus references to faith, and there are over 2,000 references to money and possessions. It is a major issue.

And frankly, it's not getting any easier for us than it was in Bible times. If anything, it's tougher. It's tougher. I mean, we live in a day when technology has provided for us such incredibly unlimited resources that the test is more severe than it's ever been. There has never been a society, for example, in the history of the world that had as much stuff as we have. Just stuff, commodities, products. And in America we probably have more than any other part of the world.

We are living in affluence that's unheard of in the world's history. Modern technology has increased our comprehension of devices and designs to the point where we can now create almost anything, short of life itself. But you know what it's revealed? Our incredible affluence, our incredible commodity development has revealed a major problem, and that is that man can't handle what he produces. We can't handle our money and we can't handle our commodities. I mean in the very simplest sense, we are in a process of ultimate selfdestruction.

Now, all of us are very much aware of this. We hear all the time about where our country is going and where the world is going with all of the economic and financial problems we have, but the problems are not economic, and the problems are not financial, and that's why nobody ever comes up with the right solution.

I mean I'm listening, you know, to Howard Jarvis and I'm listening to Jimmy Carter, who's telling everybody what to do. I'm listening to all the bills, and all the senators, and all the advice and all of the stuff that's coming down the line, but nobody yet has really put their finger on the problem. And the problem is this. You create an environment with unlimited resources, you create an environment with unlimited commodities, and you turn man loose, and he will destroy himself.

I don't care what kind of legislation you have because there is a basic truth about man that you have to recognize. He is ultimately and totally selfish. And selfishness related to productivity translates into one word: Greed. And where you have the sinful heart of man, which is egged on by selfishness, and selfishness attaching itself to products becomes greed, you have the ultimate end of selfdestruction.

The Bible tells us, for example, in Revelation chapter 18 that the world, the entire world economic system, will come to a total collapse. That's right. It'll ultimately be devastatingly destroyed. Man is on a track to total selfdestruction, because when you continue to proliferate the potential to make money and proliferate products, you give to man that which feeds the worst thing about him, which is his selfishness, and he becomes a greedy monster.

I've said to you before it always amazes me how many places carry stuff nobody can use. You just stick it places. And that's the way it is. We are maniacal in our desire for things, and, of course, we're egged on by the media. On the one hand, the president is saying, "Cut back. Tighten your belt. Pull it all in." On the other hand, the TV is saying, "Buy it. Buy it. Buy it. Go into hock for it. You gotta have it. It's life. You can't survive without it."

And so the hypocrisy of the system is unbelievable and man is trapped. He has been told all his life that he is only going to be happy when he gets all the commodities he can possibly get, and now he's told he can't have them, and so he's being forced to be unhappy.

You see, the problem is not financial. We hear about unprecedented conditions causing what is known as a global financial chaos. In fact, we are living in the first decade in recorded history of worldwide double digit inflation, and I read recently that Los Angeles is the inflation center of the world. The last count indicated 26.1 percent annual inflation at the rate it was going last month. And it's going on all over the world. There is constant talk about depression, and collapse, and crash. We have the highest number of unemployed since the depression.

And I guess maybe we know that part and parcel of this in terms of how it all got really generated is the Arab Cartel who decided to up the price of oil and has raised the cost of petroleum 500 percent. And you see, when that goes up then everything goes up because petroleum generates everything that carries every product. And so it all goes up, and that is why as I mentioned last Sunday night that this Naval Officer told me they believed that Russia's next move is to attack Israel because they must seal off the Mediterranean.

They've sealed off the east in Afghanistan and the north. They're working to seal off the south from the Indian Ocean, and if they can seal the Arab nations off the Mediterranean, they can isolate them and they can't get their oil out, and then they can move in and take it over. Because they can see potentially the collapse of the world in the indiscriminate pricing of oil products.

And so we are living in this inflationary situation. In America, we have monstrous money problems. I mean they are utterly monstrous. We have a deficit and we have enough red ink in America to fill the Red Sea. Let me just give you an idea. In 1901, the national debt was less than one billion. In 1901 it was less than one billion. In 1978, it was 800 billion. That's what we owe the banks. By next year, they estimate it'll be over a trillion dollars. That's our debt. The interest is 4 billion a year.

Do you know that if you liquidated the United States, it isn't worth a trillion dollars? We don't have assets to pay off the whole thing. But that doesn't stop anything. Prices have gone up over 100 percent in the last 10 years. The average family of 4, according to the US Department of Labor, has lost earning power, though salary has doubled because the inflation and the taxes have eaten up the gain.

Do you think that stops anything? No, we still buy more. We just go into hock for it. And the system accommodates us by producing credit cards, so that our greed knows no limit at all. It used to be that your greed was sort of hung up when you ran out of money, right? You could say, "I'm not greedy this week. I don't have any money." Now you can be greedy all the time because you don't need money.

And so what happens when we run out of gold? We just keep printing more money. And when we run out of a silver standard, we keep printing more money. And when we finally run out of money we print cards, credit cards. And you want to know what will happen when people run out of credit cards? They'll steal because that's the way greediness is. We are a greedy people.

Credit buying has escalated inflation, and then that curse of all curses on our society, the working wife, creates more money problems, putting more people into the workforce to buy more products to confuse the issue, as well as devastate the home. And by the way statistics have shown - I just read this yesterday - that the American family is in financial trouble and now according to record 50 percent of all divorces are because of financial pressure in the home. And so I thought maybe we could just add another line to the marriage ceremony, "Until debt do us part."

Now we are really in deep, folks. There is no way out. As I say, you could liquidate the whole United States of America and we couldn't pay our bill at the bank. We're dead in terms of that. We are long gone and we have gotten a taste of the fatted calf, and I believe we're fast on the pace to selfdestruction.

Now what is the answer? "Well," people say, "Our president says, and I know he means well, just everybody tighten your belt." Well what are you saying to us? What does that mean? What is that going to do to the real problem? I've been listening to all the world's solutions and they're hopelessly ineffective. We are in this mess because of a society that produced its potentiality and because of the evil of man's heart.

Now this society has been telling us through the television, the radio, the billboards, and all the rest of the things that we'll be happy when we get stuff, and now they tell us we can't have our stuff. What hypocrisy. We are in this thing because they've been telling us that happiness, and peace, and joy are found in material goods.

Let me give you the key philosophy of life in the world. Here it comes. Only as you accumulate enough assets to satisfy your particular style of life can you really be happy. That's the bottom line. Only as you accumulate enough assets to satisfy your particular style of life can you really be happy. And so, we have all this society of people who have determined what the assets they want are and they go for those things. We've got subcultures who have some strange kind of things they're after. But man has been told that he's got to have commodities.

I saw a sign on a guy's shirt yesterday I couldn't believe. "Next to sex, I like Harley-Davidsons best." Well, you know what that said - and he had on a, he looked like a guy who just came off a motorcycle, you know, grease from head to foot. But for him, what he wanted was a girl and a Harley-Davidson. I mean that's the way he read life. That was life. And if he could just get enough money to get the right girl and the right machine he was happy, he thought. And if we can just get a fancier car, just get that new wardrobe, just take that trip, just get that bigger house, whatever, we can be happy. This is what it tells us. If we can just get the right kind of commodity.

And that's exactly what the media pumps at us all the time. And we sit there, you know, and we see the big ads and they're going to take little Casper Milk Toast, and put him in this hot car, and he's going to turn into macho man, and all the girls are going to scream as he goes down the street. He's really going to be happy. And if you look kind of tacky around the house with your bathrobe with the loose threads and you see the ads for the fashions - this is what the world keeps saying. And now they're saying to us, "You can't have it anymore."

They are literally, and this is the severity of the situation we're in, somebody's been lying to the world all along and they're trying to pull the rug out from under us. They've been telling us this is where our life was and now they're saying we can't have it anymore. Isn't going to work. People say, "Oh there's so much thievery today. There's so much stealing. Why? Man's getting worse." Well, that isn't the issue. The issue is you just keep telling him he's got to have commodities to be happy, and ultimately he's going to steal for them.

So I'm not interested in the world's solutions because they're hypocrites. When they say, "Pull back. Tighten your belt. Do this. You know, give up a Big Mac and eat a regular. You can't keep up the standard you're on." When they say that to me I say, "Well, that is not the issue. You're playing around the periphery." The issue is you have told us that we'll never be happy until we can absorb the assets to make our style of life that we seek. If you tell us that, then that's the way we're going to live, and now you tell us not to do that. There's something hypocritical about it.

You see, the problem with man is that he's been lied to all along. And sadly, Christians have bought it, and we even think that happiness comes in commodities. Christianity has even become big business. Richard Kabadil says, "Christians are guilty of upward social mobility." We're trying so fast to climb the ladder to hobnob with the rich and the famous and the popular.

But that's not what our Lord said. Our heart is to be in heaven because our treasure is there, and we don't find happiness in our lives in commodities. I'm not against those commodities. I just don't seek for them. If God chooses to give us things that's at His good and gracious hand, but if we make those things the love of our life, we have missed it.

And I think basically it's because we've been lied to about where real contentment is. Listen to the Word of God. Philippians 4:11-12. Paraphrasing it. Don't look it up. Just listen to the paraphrase. "Not that I was ever in need," says Paul, "For I have learned how to get along happily whether I have much or little. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of contentment in every situation, whether it be a full stomach or hunger, whether it be plenty or want." That's it.

Paul says, "You know something? I have contentment that is absolutely and totally unrelated to possessions." Isn't that good? That's the distinction of a believer. He seeks the kingdom and God takes care of that. He puts his treasure in heaven and the Lord takes care of his need. That's what we're saying. That's what the Lord is teaching.

Now remember the Pharisees and the scribes to whom Jesus directed much of His speaking here were covetous. They were covetous. And they had the jaded perspective. They had the perspective of the world that you will be happy and content only when you have accumulated enough wealth to satisfy your desired lifestyle. But the Bible says your contentment is apart from goods. It is apart from

commodities. Your contentment comes in God, not goods.

Now let me follow that for a minute, and this is just introduction to the text we'll get to next time. Our contentment is found in God. Let me tell you why. Three words I want to give you that relate to the issue of contentment with God. Number one is the word "ownership." Mark it down, ownership. Now this is to say that God owns everything. The Bible says God is the sole owner of everything, all right? God is the sole owner of everything. Of what? Of everything, everything.

Now do you understand what I mean by that? Everything. All that is, He owns it: Your clothes, your shoes, your watch, your house, your car, your kids, everything, your garden, everything. Everything. He owns it all. In Psalm 24:1 it says this. "The earth belongs to God, everything in all the world is his." Now that's simple enough, isn't it? I mean, you don't need a whole lot of explanation about that. Everything in the world is His.

In 1 Chronicles 29:11 it says, "Everything in the heavens and earth is yours, O Lord. And this is your kingdom." All right? If I'm going to be content in life as a Christian, then the first thing I have to realize is that everything belongs to God, everything. So watch this corollary. So I can't ever gain anything anyway. Did you get that? It's His. To learn to be content, you recognize that God is the sole owner of everything.

Now listen to this. If you believe for one minute that you own one single possession, then that possession that you think you own will govern your spiritual attitudes, and that's bad. Let me give you an illustration. We have a van because we have four kids, and so we have a van, a 1977 Ford van which we enjoy as a family. Now I think it's important to take care of that van because it costs a lot to get another one, and so I want to take care of it. Now, if I say, "Boy, this is my van. I'm going to take care of my van," and my van is going along the road and somebody comes through an intersection and smashes my van.

Now, if that is my van, then I am very upset with that turkey that ran into my van. And my reaction is going to be, "You can't be that dumb. You've got to look where you're going." And then I'm going to find out the inevitable. He has no insurance, and my sanctification will flee further from my grasp. And then I'm going to take it to the body shop and the guy won't match the paint properly and I'll get it back and it'll have a big streak. And then I'll be upset with him, and then I'll be going down the street like this because the frame was bent and you can't fix that. And that'll wear out my tires, and that'll cost me money, and I will be very upset.

But, you see, that's not my van. So if somebody runs into that van, I'm just going to say, "Lord, You should be careful how You take care of Your van. Sorry this happened to Your van. I hope You have the resources to get it all fixed."



I have to deal with things in my life either from my perspective or His, as long as it's His I don't worry. They came running into John Wesley one day and they said, "Mr. Wesley - " Wesley, who was away from home. "Terrible tragedy. Your house burned down." He said, "You're wrong." They said, "No, no. Your house burned down." He said, "No. That isn't true." They said, "Well you, we're telling you your house burned down." And he said, "Well, I hear what you're saying, but it's not mine, it's the Lord's, and frankly it's one less responsibility for me to worry about." I think that's the approach. But that is not what we've been taught. That is not what we've been taught.

The accumulation of self-owned property is the legacy of the world to us, and we need to break that understanding. We don't own anything. I don't own my house, my car, my children, I don't own anything. Therefore, that has some spin offs that are tremendous. Therefore, if I lose something, I didn't really lose it because I never owned it anyway. If somebody else needs it, they're just as welcome to it as I am because I don't own it, the Lord does, and if the Lord knows they need it it's theirs.

I mean, if everything that I have is shifted to somebody else that's not my problem. The Lord's going to have to take some from somebody to meet my need. But I have to begin with the comprehension that God owns everything. But this is a problem for us in America because this whole concept of capitalism has been such an American legacy to us, and we're willing to stand up and fight for it so much that we forget that it isn't a Christian principle, at all.

Now listen. In 1914, a man named Harvey Calkins wrote a book and the book is entitled The Elements of Stewardship. And he said in that book some very, very salient things that I think will help you realize where I'm coming from. He said that we have received a heritage of ownership from our society and not from the Bible. This is a quote.

He puts it this way. "There has been but one nation whose concept of property ownership was based on ownership by God, and that was the nation of Israel. All the other nations we have knowledge of: The Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans; their underlying philosophy of the ownership of property and their laws relating to property were based on the concept of the individual owning what he possessed. Where did we receive our standards of property ownership? It is rooted in the law of the Roman Empire. The Roman philosophy of life crystalized in Roman law and through that law standardized in Christian civilization was not built on the law of the Lord, which is ownership by God but was built on the law of man, which is ownership by man.

"The average man - " says Calkins " - unless he has met the issue squarely and jarred himself loose from inherited traditions, remains caught in a false concept of property ownership. His Christian instinct is entangled with the honest belief that he is the owner of what he has merely been given to possess. His whole history and entire culture compel him to believe that he is the owner of his

property.”

And that’s not true. Oh, in a legal sense in America because that’s our philosophy it’s true, but in a real sense you don’t own anything and neither do I. And if I don’t own it, then I don’t mind if I lose it, and I don’t get too hepped up if I gain it, because it’s never mine, anyway.

Second word - first word, ownership. In understanding contentment with God there’s a second word, and that is “control.” The first thing you have to understand is that God owns everything. The second thing is that He controls everything. He controls everything. He is the owner and the controller. For example, the Old Testament gives special attention to the fact that God controls all of circumstances for His own ends.

Listen to First Chronicles 29 - paraphrasing it again. “We adore you as being in control of everything.” I love that. “We adore you as being in control of everything. Riches and honor come from you alone, and you are the ruler of all mankind. Your hand controls power and might, and it is at your discretion that men are made great and given strength.” In other words, God, You control everything. You control riches. You control honor. You control power, and might, and greatness, and strength. You call all the shots. You move all the commodities around.

Daniel in chapter 2 - if you were with us you’ll remember - was praising God, and this is what he said. I love this. Daniel 2:20 he said, “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever: for he alone has all wisdom and all power.” Now listen to this. “World events are under his control.”

In other words Daniel says, “God, You control everything.” And later on in the Book of Daniel, when Daniel was thrown into the lions’ den, that kind of theology really held him in good stead, didn’t it? He got down in the lions’ den and he was in utterly terrible circumstances. I mean, you can’t imagine anything worse than being dropped into a pit with a bunch of hungry lions. And there were lot of those lions, by the way, enough to devour a whole family of relatives who were thrown in, and they were all eaten before they it the ground, so there were plenty of them in there. Well, they threw Daniel in there and he had a wonderful time. He was at ease. He was relaxed. He probably laid down on a nice big furry lion and went to sleep.

And the king, the king who was in perfect circumstances, living in the Babylon palace with the hanging gardens, and all the wonder, and the pomp that could be his as the greatest monarch in the world; at the same time Daniel was having a great evening with the lions, he couldn’t eat, he couldn’t sleep, he couldn’t drink, he didn’t want to be entertained, why? What’s the difference? Daniel knew that in anything God was in total control. The other guy was a wreck because he had no sense of a divine controller. Circumstances were beyond his control. That’s the difference. Daniel knew God was in control.

Now listen, if you know God owns everything and controls everything, then you're not going to put your hope in luxury and you're not going to fear if you don't have enough necessity. God knows what you need. God says He'll provide all your needs according to His riches by Christ Jesus. He'll give you all you need. He'll take care of everything that's necessary for your life. God will dispense to you what He knows you have to have to invest in His kingdom. God takes care of all of it. That's not your worry. And that's the reason it says in this passage three times, "Don't be anxious. Don't worry."

Now there's a third word I want you to see. That's the word "provision." Ownership, control, and provision. God owns everything. Now watch this. He owns everything and He controls everything to provide for His own. Now did you get that? He owns everything and controls it to make provision.

The Old Testament gives Him many names but one of the most lovely of the names of God is Jehovah-Jireh. "Jehovah-Jireh" means "the Lord who provides," the Lord who provides. It is so much a characteristic of God that it is His name. Now we would never argue that God is love, and we would never argue that God is glorious, and that God is great, and mighty, and holy, and just, and good, but some would argue that God provides, and they might question, and doubt, and be afraid that God isn't going to meet their needs.

And that's exactly what the Lord speaks to in verses 25 to 34, when He says, "Don't worry about what you eat or what you wear or all of those things. The Lord is still Jehovah-Jireh." That's His name, and His name is synonymous with an attribute. God is a God who provides, and that is why David said, "I have never seen God's people begging - " what? " - bread." Because God is Jehovah-Jireh.

In Luke 12:30-31 - again paraphrasing the text - it says, "All mankind scratches for its daily bread." Boy, the world digs, and scratches, and claws, and hoards, and makes sure it has enough. But in opposition to that, your Father knows your needs and He will always give you all you need day by day. What a promise. What an incredibly wonderful promise. He knows your need.

Listen, I don't have to own everything to meet my need. I don't have to control everything to meet my need. I can receive what God gives me. I can invest it in His eternal kingdom. I can put away all anxiety about my needs, and I can worship God with my life, and have the absolute promise that He will provide everything I need, and even beyond that. To me, that's a tremendous thing. In 1 Timothy 6 it says, "If we have food and covering, with this let us be content." Are you? Are you? Or do you grasp for more, denying God in the process?

In World War II, there were many people killed as you well know, and the killing of many adults left many orphans. The allies at the close of World War II wanted to do something to help the little orphans, and so they provided some camps, and they would gather the orphans together, and they would feed them there and try to find a place to locate them. And as they would begin to feed them

from their malnutrition, they would begin to develop and to grow, and they would be able to take more and more food, and they were getting the finest care and the finest food. But in one of these camps particularly they became very, very perplexed because the children couldn't sleep.

They would eat three good meals, but at night they would lie awake and they couldn't sleep. They couldn't figure out what it was, whether it was some physical problem or what. Finally exhausting the physical, they brought in some psychologists to do a study of these orphans to find out why with all of this food and care, they still couldn't sleep. Well, the psychologists came up with a solution. Every night when the little children were put to bed, someone would come down the row of the beds and in each little hand would place a great big piece of bread.

And so the last thing they would experience at night would be to close the little hand around the bread, tuck it in, and invariably, in a matter of days, they were all sleeping through the night. Why? Even though they were fed to the full during the day, their experience had taught them that there was no hope for tomorrow, and in anxiety over what might happen the next day, they couldn't sleep. They couldn't enjoy what they had because they were afraid of the future.

Oh, do I know a lot of people like that. The little children couldn't sleep because they had too many days with no food, and when they had a little piece of bread tucked in their hand, and they knew that at least they'd have breakfast tomorrow, they could sleep. Do you know what God has done for us? I believe God has given us a piece of bread for our hand, and I never go to bed at night without that little piece of bread.

And you know what that little piece of bread is? It's this. "But my God shall supply - " what? " - all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus." And if I have that little piece of bread in my hand, I can sleep. I don't need to stockpile for the future. I don't need to hoard against the future. God is the owner of everything in the world, and God controls all those assets, and He does it to provide for me. Why? Because I'm His child.

And that's why the Lord says, "Don't you know your heavenly Father feeds them - " in verse 26, the birds " - and are you not much better than they?" I mean if He feeds birds, is He going to feed His own children? What a great truth. He is the owner, and the controller, and the provider.

So life for me, see, as a Christian consists not in the abundance of things which I possess, Luke 12:15. That isn't life for me. Life for me is in being - Hebrews 13:5 - content with such things as I have. Now, if the Lord chooses to give me more, that's fine. I have to remember it's His, anyway, and it has to be used for His glory and for His kingdom.

And it comes down to this sometimes. "Well," I say, "There's a need over here. So-and-so has a need." And then something says to me, "Yes, but what about in the future? Why, you might run out of

food, or you don't know what's coming, or your children might get sick, or whatever might happen. But so-and-so has a need. I've got this, and they need it now, and I'm looking at the future, that's no decision for me. I'm going to take that resource that God owns and use it in God's way to provide, and in the future God will have to provide in another way."

When it comes down to that, now some people just can't make that decision. And so we tend to stockpile and hoard inordinate amounts. I don't mean it's wrong to plan for the future. I think God expects us to do that. It's in the Book of Proverbs to do that. But I'm talking about when you cling to that, and when your hope is in that, and your faith is in that, and you live in fear of that, and you can't release that, and you feel it's yours.

You know, I have to admit to you that when I see a need and somebody makes an appeal to that need, there's just something in me that just wants to shovel it all in that direction. Do you feel that way? I just that's just the way my heart goes, and I don't always think about the future. Short of being foolish, I think that's the way we have to learn to live. Amassing money and possessions provides no contentment. To be contented is to pour your treasure into a heavenly vault where it'll have eternal dividends.

To be content is to not worry about what you eat, or what you drink, or what you shall wear, but just to hold in your hand that little piece of bread every night when you tuck yourself asleep that says my God shall supply all your needs. And then whatever resources I do have I make available to whoever needs them.

So a right relationship to God is at the bottom of true contentment, trusting Him as owner, controller, and provider. That, friends, is the Bible's answer, the Bible's answer to inflation, the Bible's answer to greed, the Bible's answer to stealing, the Bible's answer to selfishness and pride is to just believe that God will meet your every need. After all, He's your Father. What do you have to worry about? I dare say that the reason those little orphans were afraid was because they were orphans, huh? They didn't have a father to provide. We do.

Now, I'm not saying it's wrong to have possessions. I'm not saying it's wrong to have money. I'm just saying it's wrong to covet them, and cling to them, and build your life around them. I really believe that this is a major issue facing the church today. I think Christianity instead of offering an alternative, instead of being distinct, instead of being apart from the world, has become materialistic in many ways, self-indulgent. It's a fearful thing.

I don't know that Christians anymore are willing to be the off-scouring of the world. I mean, you know, this idea of ascending the scale. John White says, and he's written a very helpful book. You should read it. It's called *The Golden Cow*. And John White says in that book that we have bowed down to the golden cow of materialism and we need Christ to make a whip and cleanse the temple all over

again. Let me read you some paragraphs from his book.

“The 20th century church has also forgotten which master she belongs to, painting herself like a hussy in her silly portrait of lord mammon. Or to use another image, the church has gone awhoring after a golden cow; not a calf, if you please, but a cow; and I call her a “golden cow” because her udders are engorged with liquid gold, especially in the west, where she grazes in meadows lush with greenbacks. Her priests placate her by slaughtering godly principles, upon whose blood she looks with tranquil satisfaction. Anxious rows of worshippers bow down before their buckets. Although the gold squirts endlessly, the worshippers are trembling lest the supply of sacrificial victims should one day fail to appease her.”

Then White says, “I used to be angry with my fellow fundamentalists and outraged at certain evangelical institutions because of their materialistic attitudes. But my rage has long since subsided. I even went through a charitable and patronizing stage, may God forgive me. Who am I to rage or to patronize? I know some children whose mothers are whores. Can you imagine what it feels like to discover your mother goes to bed with men for money? In point of fact, such children feel a variety of emotions ranging from indifference, to bitter rejection, to shame, to hurt mingled with compassion. It’s hard to quit loving your own mother, even if she is a whore. You’ve only got one.

“Fundamentalism is my mother. I was nurtured in her warm bosom. She cared for me with love and taught me all she knew. I owe her, humanly speaking, my life, my spiritual food, and many of my early joys. She introduced me to the Savior and taught me to feed on the bread of life. Our relationship wasn’t all honey and roses, but she was the only mother I had. I clung to her then and find it hard not to lean on her now. If she let me down at times I’m old enough to realize that no mother is perfect, but to find out that she was a whore, that she let herself be used by money was another matter. And as the wider evangelical movement gradually took her place in my life it was painful to make the same discovery twice.”

It’s pretty potent and true. I believe that churches today face a tremendous collective materialism on the part of their members. We’re like the man in Luke 12 of whom the Bible says, “He kept building barns bigger and bigger and bigger.” And this is not for Christians. Where can we get our distinctness in the world if we fall prey to this which so dominates the thinking of the world?

Now again, I’m not saying we’re to be poor. I mean, I’ll be very personal about this. Take the preacher for example. Some people think the preacher ought to be very poor, make him into a man of prayer. Well, that’s all right. Other people think the preacher ought to be very rich cause if he’s very rich, he’ll attract rich people, and rich people feed the budget. Posh pastor, posh congregation, right?

John White says something about that I think is interesting. He said, “If you have any trouble about what to pay your pastor, what would be wrong with giving him 50 percent more than whatever sum

seems reasonable? Are you afraid it'll make him too money conscious? If so what business did you have in appointing him as your pastor? If you're in a position to pick a pastor, you should also know that God expects you to discern whether he has a weakness about money, and if he has a weakness about money, you should never have given him the responsibility of a pastorate, because the Bible says he should not be greedy of filthy lucre.

"Some churches like to give high salaries because the pastor's standard of living will affect the kind of people who will attend. But God is concerned with motives, not with amounts. Do you resent the thought of your pastor having too much money? Then double his salary to show him your love for him. But you say, 'Aren't there better ways of showing love?' Well, of course there are. But why not show him love in this way, too? Do you ask me what happens if the salary is too much for him? Then I answer, that's the pastor's problem. He could give more money away, for instance, pray that he may have wisdom in handling what he doesn't need."

Now listen, I read that to you because Grace Church pays me too much money already. And several years ago one of the men - I asked that, "Why do you pay me so much money?" And they said, "Because we want to see what you do with what you don't need." That's fair. That's fair. I have that responsibility, don't I? It isn't a question of how much you have, it's a question of where your heart is. I can receive from the Lord.

You know, it's amazing in Christianity today there are people who want to come and speak at our church but their minimum fee is \$5,000.00. They want - there's people who want to come and sing, and they charge \$8,000.00 and up. Now, not all of them are like that. Oh, there are lots of people who will give a testimony for Christ for \$1,500.00, lots of them. You see we've gotten into a situation - I talked to a publisher who recently told me that in order to get an author to sign on the bottom line that he'd write a Christian book for them they had to pay him a \$200,000.00 advance.

Now, books are a wonderful ministry, but if you write a book to make money that's a wrong motive. If you write a book to honor God and to advance His kingdom, then if He chooses to give you money from that that's wonderful, and you use that as His possession, under His control, to provide for His body. You see, it's all in your perspective.

And let me tell you this as we wrap up our thinking. All that you have, all your money and possession - now watch this - more than anything else - now listen to this - you don't need it to meet your needs. God will do that anyway, right? So, why do you have it? Why do you have your house, your car, your bank account? Why do you have that? I'll tell you why. Here it is. It is a test of your spirituality. Did you get that? That's what it is. It is a test of your spirituality. How are you doing is the issue.

You don't need it because God is going to take care of you anyway. It is a test and God is testing the legitimacy of your spiritual claim by what you possess. Frightening, isn't it? I believe that perhaps the

very best revealer of true spirituality is money. And that's what the Lord's going to show us as we go on in this text. How to handle luxury, that's 19 to 24. How to handle necessity, 25 to 34.

Now listen, I'm going to close with this thought. A careful reading of the Bible will reveal that rich people are condemned. That's true. Rich people are condemned in the Bible. But listen, they're never condemned for their riches. They're always condemned for the misuse of it. did you get that? The misuse. We live in a society where we know riches. God help us not to misuse that.

Poor people are condemned, too, in the Bible, not because they're poor, but because in their poverty they would question God's equity and God's love. Being poor is a test of trust, and so is being rich. When you have it, you trust in it, and when you don't have it, maybe you've failed to trust God. No matter how you cut it, possessions and money are a spiritual test.

Now, I hope you examined yourself as to the luxuries in the past text and will examine yourself as to the necessities in the one to come. That's why Proverbs 30:8-9 says to the Lord, "Lord, neither give me poverty nor riches; - " don't give me the extreme of either " - just give me my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, Who is the Lord? Or I may become poor, and steal, and dishonor the name of my God."

You see, having it is a test and so is not having it. The one who has it is tempted not to trust God, and the one who doesn't is tempted to dishonor His name. And so we are tested. The question is how are we doing? We have so much more as we go into this text.

Let me tell you what next week's going to be: Three reasons why you should never worry about money. Three reasons why you should never worry. And we'll see that next time. Let's pray together.

Our Father, this has been just a very practical time this morning and yet really a worship time. We can't worship You properly unless we can worship You with our money and goods. We do worship You by laying up treasure in heaven, and by seeking first the kingdom, and letting You add all these necessities.

Help us, Lord, to worship with a true and a pure heart. Thank You that You own everything, You control everything, You provide everything for Your children. And, Lord, I just know, too, that there are some here in our midst this morning who are not Your children. You love them and You died for them, but they've never said yes. They've never opened their heart to receive You. They're not in Your family and they have no guarantee of Your provision.

We pray, Lord, that this might be the day when their hearts are opened by the Spirit of God, their hearts become receptive, that day when they believe in Jesus Christ who died and rose for them, and they enter upon the miracle of birth into Your family and come under the providence of Your care. We



pray, Lord, that this might happen in many hearts this morning.

Some who came here outside the family may go home in the family. And some, Father, who have been in the family, but who have wasted the resources, and been possessive, and selfish - and greedy, and it's touched every one of us, including my own heart - might go away with a new resolve to so live to Your honor that our treasure is in heaven, and our seeking is of Your kingdom and righteousness.

Thank You for being so gracious, Father, not to just give us what we think we possess, but to give us the world and eternity. In Christ's name, amen.

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