

May 10, 2026
Pursuing the Kingdom: Whom Do You Serve?
Matthew 6:19-24
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...As we continue making our way through the Gospel of Matthew and the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, it's important to remember that Jesus is not giving disconnected teachings. He is laying out a whole, new, way of life for the believer. From chs. 5-7, He is describing what it looks like to live under the reign of God and what it means to pursue the kingdom of God in real, everyday life.

He has already addressed our righteousness by warning against such things as anger, lust and hypocrisy in ch. 5. Then in ch. 6, He turns to our spiritual practices like giving, prayer and fasting. And in each case, the emphasis has been the same, "Don't live for the applause of people but, rather, do everything for the glory of God the Father who sees in secret."

Now, as we come to Matthew 6:19-24, Jesus turns to another deeply personal area of life. Our relationship with money and our possessions. And, again, this transition is not random. Because nothing reveals the true posture of the heart quite like what we treasure. You can tell a great deal about a person by what excites them, what worries them, what consumes their thoughts and where their resources consistently go. In many ways, our treasure becomes a glimpse into what we worship.

That is why this passage is ultimately about pursuing the kingdom of God. Because the kingdom is not simply something we claim with our words only. It is something that reorders our priorities and it's evidenced by how we live our lives. Jesus is forcing us to wrestle with a difficult, but unavoidable, question, "What are you truly living for?"

And so the passage we're going to jump into today is not just about money, it's about allegiance. It's about what you treasure and who you serve. So if you are able, please stand with me as I read God's Word this morning from the Gospel of Matthew 6:19-24.
[Read Passage]

Jesus begins with a command that immediately goes against our very nature. [Read] This is not a casual suggestion, it's a prohibition. And it goes against everything our culture tells us. We are told to accumulate, to secure, to build and to protect at all costs that which is ours. And from a young age, we are taught to measure success by what we have and what we can hold onto. But Jesus says, "Don't store up treasures on earth." In other words, don't allow greed or the fear of losing, or not having something, drive you to hoarding up stuff to lull you into a false sense of security.

Why? Because earthly treasure is temporary and vulnerable. And He uses three images here to make His point: bugs, rust and thieves. You may have a footnote in your Bible that says that the word for "rust" can also be translated as "worm." The ESV translates it as rust, you may have worm, but either way, both make sense in the context. The point is, these are all reminders of why our stuff is temporary, none of it will last.

In that day, wealth often consisted of expensive clothing, healthy crops and precious metals. Moths, and other bugs, could eat the clothing and ruin crops. Rust, or

more literally, corrosion, could ruin metal. Thieves could break in and take what you thought was secure. In other words, everything you build your life around in this world is subject to decay, loss and disappearance. It doesn't last. You may have heard the old saying, "you can't take it with you," or "You never see a U-Haul being towed by a hearse." The point is, even if you have been blessed with wealth and possessions in this life, one day everything will be destroyed and only the eternal will last as we're told in 2 Peter 3:10-12.

Think about how quickly things change in life, especially in regards to money and possessions. Investments fluctuate. Markets crash. Our stuff breaks down. Thieves come and steal. What feels secure today can be gone tomorrow. Jesus is not saying that having material things is evil. He is saying they are unstable foundations for your life. You can't put your trust in them. Therefore, we must build our lives on a firmer foundation, on things which are eternal and not on things that are here today and gone tomorrow.

Which He, then, says in vs. 20. [Read] This is not a call to avoid any responsibility or wise planning when dealing with our finances, it is a call to re-think how we invest our time and money. To live in such a way that what you value most is not temporary, but eternal. Treasure in heaven is not about earning "brownie points" in heaven by our good deeds, it is about investing your life in what matters to God. It includes our generosity, faithfulness, obedience, love and the advancement of His kingdom.

And then comes the key statement that explains everything in vs. 21, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Notice the direction here. Jesus does not say, "where your heart is, your treasure will follow." No, He says, "where your treasure is, your heart follows." In other words, what you invest in shapes what you love. What you give your money and time to directs your affections. The great evangelist, Billy Graham, once said, "[Your] checkbook is a theological document, it will tell you who and what you worship."

This is where the issue of tithing and generosity becomes deeply relevant to us. For the follower of Jesus, tithing is not merely a financial obligation, it is a spiritual discipline that we are to practice in obedience. Tithing is the practice of giving back to God, through the local church, a portion of what He has entrusted to us, traditionally understood as a tenth of one's income.

That's where we get the word "tithe" from, it literally means "tenth." In the Old Testament, God commanded His people to give a tenth of what they earned to support the ministry of the temple and the care of those in need. It was both an act of obedience and an acknowledgment that everything ultimately belonged to God. Under the new covenant, the New Testament emphasizes cheerful, willing and generous giving. The problem with us, is that we can be very cheerful and willing to drop a few dollars in the box in the back but it's the "generous" part many of us struggle with.

Richard Stearns, in his book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, cites a study that shows that, on average, the American church-goer only tithes 2% of their total income, a far cry from 10. So, although the tithe is not mentioned in the New Testament, the emphasis is on the importance and benefits of freewill giving. We are to give as we are able. Sometimes that means giving more than 10% and sometimes it may mean giving less. It depends on the person and their circumstances. But, every believer should diligently pray and seek God's wisdom in the matter of giving. However much we give, we should offer it with pure motives, a cheerful heart and an attitude of worship.

Now, as a pastor, I get asked all the time, “How do I tithe?” And, “What's the difference between a tithe and an offering?” First of all, in the true sense of the word, the tithe is a tenth of your gross income and it is to be given to your local church, whether you're a member or not. If you are a member here, when you agreed to become a member, you made a covenant to give of your means to the ministry of this church and whether you are doing that or not is between you and God. But even if you are not a member, if you are a follower of Jesus, you are commanded to give to His work wherever you find yourself and, if that's here, then that's where you give your tithe.

Now, an offering, then, is anything above the tithe that you feel the Lord leading you to give too. For example, we are in the middle of our Penny Crusade campaign to raise money for missions. Any money given towards that is to be above, and beyond, the tithe. The same is true for the Baby Bottles for Branches or any other ministry you want to support. Anything that is outside the general operating expenses of the church is an offering.

Now, giving is one of the clearest ways we declare that our security and identity are not rooted in money, but in God. Tithing pushes back against greed and reminds us that we are stewards of what we have, not owners. It supports the work of God's kingdom through the local church enabling ministry, missions, discipleship and care for others in need. Throughout Scripture, God's people are called not only to worship Him with their words, but with their resources by giving to further His kingdom.

Most importantly, tithing reflects trust. It says, “God, I believe You are my provider.” Especially in seasons when finances feel tight and giving becomes an act of faith. As God, Himself, says through the prophet Malachi in Malachi 3:10, “Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” How is this accomplished? God says, through the faithful giving of His people.

[what's going on at the church...]

You see, when you consistently give a portion of what God has entrusted to you back to Him, you are training your heart. You are declaring, “My security is not in what I keep, but in the God who provides.” Giving is one of the primary ways we lay up treasure in heaven.

And let's be honest, this is where the tension often rises. As the English preacher, John Wesley, once said, “The last part of a man to be converted is his wallet.” Because, if we're honest, money isn't just money. It represents security, comfort, control and sometimes even identity. To give it away, especially sacrificially, can feel like a loss.

But in the economy of the kingdom, it is actually a gain. It loosens the grip of materialism and anchors your heart in something greater. As John Wesley also said, “I value all things only by the price they shall gain in eternity.” And so, I encourage you to be obedient to God's command and prayerfully consider your finances before God and then bring your tithe into the storehouse and let God use it to build His kingdom.

Well, then Jesus then moves to a second illustration in vs. 22-23. [Read] At first glance, this can feel disconnected, but it is tied to what He has just said. The “eye” here refers to your perspective, your focus, the way you see and evaluate life. A “healthy” eye is

one that is clear, undivided and focused on what is good and true. A “bad” eye, in the cultural context, often referred to greed, envy or a distorted way of seeing.

So Jesus is saying that how you see determines how you live. If your vision is shaped by the values of the kingdom, your life will be filled with “light” and the pursuit of that kingdom. But if your vision is clouded by materialism, comparison, and greed, it affects everything, and you will find yourself in the dark and controlled by these impulses.

Think of it like this. Your eye is like a window. If the window is clean, light comes in and fills the room. If the window is dirty or blocked, the room remains dark. In the same way, if your perspective is fixed on earthly treasure, then your whole life begins to revolve around it. But if your vision is set on God’s kingdom, it brings clarity and purpose. As theologian A. W. Tozer once said, “The [person] who has God for [their] treasure has all things.” That’s what a healthy eye looks like, it sees God as the ultimate treasure.

And then Jesus brings His point home in vs. 24. [Read] This is the heart of the passage. And, again, it is not just about money, it is about mastery. It is about who or what ultimately rules your life.

Jesus declares, “You cannot serve both God and money.” The word for money here, “mammon,” refers not just to currency, but to wealth as a system of trust and security. Jesus personifies it as a rival master.

Notice what He does not say. He does not say, “you should not have money.” He says, “you cannot serve it.” The issue is not possession, its devotion. It is true that you can have money without serving it. And it is also true that you can serve money without having much of it. The question is, what do you put your trust in and what do you depend on?

This is where pursuing the kingdom becomes extremely practical. Because every day, you are making decisions that reveal who your master truly is and which kingdom you serve. How you spend, how you save, how you give... these are not just financial choices, they are spiritual indicators.

Imagine trying to, literally, serve two masters. Two bosses giving conflicting commands. One says go here, the other says go there. One says prioritize this, the other says prioritize that. It’s impossible. Eventually, you will have to choose. Jesus is saying the same is true spiritually. You cannot live with divided allegiance. At some point, your life will reveal what, and who, you truly serve.

So what does this mean for us? It means we have to examine our hearts honestly. Not just in what we say we value, but in what we actually pursue. Where does your money go? What occupies your thoughts? What drives your decisions? These are important questions that we must ask ourselves.

It also means we must intentionally invest in the kingdom. That includes our generosity, giving to the work of God, supporting the church and caring for those in need. Tithing becomes one tangible way to align your life with the kingdom. It is not about legalism, it is about lordship. It is a declaration that God, not money, is your master. Billy Graham said another time, “God does not need our money. He owns everything, including ‘our’ money. What He wants us to discover is where our central focus of worship lies. Is that focus on God or our money?”

As we move toward a conclusion, let me bring it back to the heart of the passage. Jesus is not trying to take something from you, He is offering you freedom. Freedom from

the anxiety of trying to secure what cannot last. Freedom from the bondage of living for accumulating stuff. Freedom from the illusion that money can fill that emptiness in you that only God can truly satisfy. Because here's the truth. Whatever you treasure will shape you. Whatever you serve will master you. And whatever you fix your eyes on will direct your life.

So the question is, "What are you building your life around?" Are you storing up treasures that will fade, or investing in what will last? Is your eye fixed on the kingdom, or clouded by the temporary things of this world? Is your life marked by divided loyalty, or wholehearted devotion to God?

As you leave today, consider one practical step. Maybe it's reevaluating how you give. Maybe it's taking a step of generosity that stretches your trust. Maybe it's simply asking God to realign your heart to prioritize furthering His kingdom. Whatever it is, I encourage you to yield to the Spirit's leading in this area of your life.

Because pursuing the kingdom of God is not just about what you say, it's about what you treasure and whom you serve. And when those things are aligned in God, you find something far greater than anything this world can offer. You find life anchored in eternity. Let's Pray.

"Father, we confess how easily our hearts become attached to temporary things. We live in a world that constantly tells us to pursue more, accumulate more and trust in what we can see. And yet Your Word reminds us that earthly treasure fades, but Your kingdom endures forever.

Search our hearts today. Reveal where our trust has shifted from You to lesser things. Teach us to hold our possessions with open hands and to treasure Christ above all else. Free us from the grip of greed, comparison and anxiety. Help us to live generously, faithfully and with eternal perspective.

Lord, shape us into people who seek first Your kingdom. Let our finances, our priorities, our time and our decisions reflect that You alone are our Master. And may our lives point others to the lasting joy found only in You. We pray all these things in the name of Jesus, Amen."

Benediction: May you go with your heart fixed on treasures that never fade, your eyes set clearly on the kingdom of God, and your life fully surrendered to God, the true master. May the Father free you from divided loyalties and fill you with joy as you pursue Him, and His kingdom, above all else. Amen.