

SLIDE 1

Motive for Money

Matthew 6:19-24

September 17, 2023 West Valley Presbyterian Church

In the past few weeks in our study of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, we've talked about our motives for charitable giving, and our motives for fasting, and what Jesus says about our motives. We've talked about our motives for praying, and the motive that God seeks. Today, we're going to hear what Jesus has to say about our relationship with money in general. How important is money to us? What is our motive for accumulating money?

Today we will be studying Matthew 6:19-24. Hear now the word of God as it comes to us through Matthew.

SLIDE 2-5

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy,^[a] your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy,^[b] your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."

Does anyone have any actual cash on them? I have some, right here. (Show a bill.) There's lots of words printed on this bill: Lincoln, Federal Reserve Note, The United States of America, Five Dollars, This Note Is Legal Tender for All Debts, Public and Private. And also, on the back, "In God We Trust." Every single coin, from the silver dollar to the penny, has the phrase "In God We Trust" printed on it. Every single bill, from the \$100 bill down to the dollar bill, has the phrase "In God We Trust" printed on it. I think that's pretty funny. Is it my trust in God that makes my money commercially trustworthy? Well, if I go to Safeway to buy groceries, and I haul out some cash, does Safeway accept the cash because I trust in God? Or does Safeway accept the cash because God has made it trustworthy? No! Safeway accepts my cash because it's backed up by the Federal Reserve.

This whole passage is about trusting in God, **rather than** trusting in money; and here we have "In God we trust" printed on all our money! Why? Maybe it's just that we feel more comfortable trusting our money if it's got "In God We Trust" written on it.

Regardless - we all have strong motives to trust our money. Me included. Like the picture in the bulletin! Money can buy things that are genuine blessings. For example, if we have money, we will probably be healthier, because we can buy fresh food and pay for medical and dental care. If we have money, we will probably be safer, because we can afford to live in a lower-crime area. If we have money, it's easier to get places because we can afford a car, and the insurance and fuel. If we have money, we can buy symphony tickets, or go see a 49ers game, or buy gifts for the grandchildren, or donate to a worthy cause. And if we have a LOT of money, we also have the power to make our voices heard at City Hall. I'm sure that if Mark Zuckerberg called Matt Mahan, Matt would be glad to take the call. So why does Jesus tell us not to store up treasures on earth?

Well, to start off with, because the things that money can buy – even if they are cherished things - they don't last forever. Eventually my car will rust away, and return to the elements from which it came. Most of the books that I had bought and cherished over the years had to go to the landfill when we moved to San Jose, because there wasn't room for them here and no one else in Tuolumne County wanted them. Eventually the microbes in the soil will degrade them, and all that paper and ink will become part of the soil themselves. Eventually the concerts or the games I enjoyed will fade from my memory. Eventually any power or influence that I might have had will end. And eventually my body will be returned to its elements. As Jesus points out, critters, or microbes, or chemical reactions will eventually destroy the things we have treasured; and that's if thieves haven't already stolen them. Why wouldn't we want God instead, who does last forever – even beyond the universe itself?

But can't we do both? Can't we have both God AND money? Seems like that should work, doesn't it? Well, Jesus says it doesn't. He says that we cannot serve both God and money. He doesn't say, "Don't serve both God and money." He says that we can't. Well, why not? Because, by definition, we can have only one top priority. What happens to us if money is our top priority? We change. We become less like the young man on the bulletin, thrilled with his cash, and more like Ebenezer Scrooge before his conversion, that's what happens. As Charles Dickens puts it, "Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!" Is that really what we want, to become like Scrooge? He might have been rich, but he certainly wasn't happy – at least, not before those three spirits showed up and he gave his money away!

And what happens to us if God is our top priority? Again, we change – but in a different direction. We become less like your standard entitled person, who wants what she wants, right now, right away, regardless of whether that's possible; and more like Marvis, who was much more interested in finding out about the people around her, than she ever was in talking about herself. Marvis was someone for whom God was her top priority. And when God is our top priority, his love starts changing us. We stop seeing people as creatures, that we can use, to get what we want, right now. Instead, we start seeing people more as Marvis did, as God's cherished treasures, made in his image, whom he loves beyond measure. When God's love begins changing us, our eyes change. We begin to see as God sees, and love as God loves. I certainly enjoyed visiting Marvis, and so did her caregivers whom I spoke with. We enjoyed our time with her because we felt seen and listened to – as a result of how God worked in and through Marvis.

That's why Jesus says what he does about the eye being the lamp of the body. Physically speaking, if our eyes are functioning properly (healthy in this translation, implying also generous), then the light that enters them makes it possible for us to see. If our eyes are not functioning properly (unhealthy in this translation, implying also stingy), then the light that enters them does NOT make it possible for us to see. Spiritually speaking, if God is our top priority, then our spiritual eyes are functioning properly and are healthy. The light that shines forth from God, all the time, enters our spiritual eyes and makes it possible for us to see and respond generously to what God is doing. But if God is not our top priority, then our spiritual eyes are NOT healthy. They are blinded, and we are NOT able to see and respond to what God is doing.

We do have a choice in the matter. If we want God as our top priority, then that's what will happen. It will be his love filling our souls and changing our lives. It will be his presence always with us, so that we are never alone. We will learn to see other people as he does, and learn to love them as he does. We will be filled with love and life and laughter. Joy. Why wouldn't we want that? Of course we would. And if God is our top priority, then nothing else is. Including not our money. Jesus says it's either-or, it's not both-and. We cannot serve both God and money, so we should quit trying to do so. It won't work! If we serve God, that's when we truly can say, "In God we trust."

SLIDE 6

And if we truly trust God in everything, including our money, what would that look like? Well, for one thing, trusting in God means that we will be generous – open-handed rather than tight-fisted. And I am so impressed by how generous this congregation is. Dave Blanchard, who is head of finance, often says, "We have a very generous congregation." And it's true. We are generous. When the town of Lahaina burned down, we raised \$4400 in a week to send to the Maui food bank, to help those who had lost everything. Whenever the church budget starts heading towards the red zone, there always seems to be some extra donations that get us back in the black. We trust God, we are generous, and it works out, right?

And now that we have agreed, by vote of the Session, to provide part of the money that the church planters need to support them as they start a new church, now we have many more opportunities for generosity. We have responded to Jesus; and we want other people to respond to him as well, right? Yes, we can reach out to our friends; and, if we also want younger people to respond to Jesus, then the church planters are in a much better position to reach them than we are. We are fortunate that they are willing to take the risk to leave salaried positions in a big church to come here and start something new.

TURN OFF SERMON SLIDES

Remember that Jesus tells us what where our treasure is, there our hearts will be also. Remember the love that God has for you, and choose him above all else. If you do that, the love and the joy that grow day by day in you, shine out from you into your home and your neighborhood and your church and wherever you are. Money can give us many good things; but they won't last

forever. Putting "In God we trust" on our money isn't good enough. Let's truly turn to God, and trust in him alone. Let's pray.