

# Sermons on Matthew

## Where's Your Treasure?

*Matthew 6:16-21*

*With Study Questions*

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## Where's Your Treasure?

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Moreover,    when you fast, do not be like the    hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. <sup>-17-</sup> But you, when you fast,    anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>-18-</sup> so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you    openly. <sup>19-</sup>    “   Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>-20-</sup>    but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>-21-</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:16-21)

## A Show

Indignant sixties icon Jimi Hendrix wrote, “White-collar conservative flashin’ down the street, pointing his plastic finger at me...”—thus conjuring up mental pictures of pious, smug, self-righteous, and hypocritical members of antiseptic, sin-free churches; the NRA; and all-white country clubs, who both fear and envy the free-wheeling radicals who had discovered an inner liberation which delivered them from the socio-political constraints endemic to the ‘50s.

And though I view this more as a caricature (giving Hollywood the necessary moral villains to play opposite their immoral anti=heroes) than a reality, it’s not as if history has not had its share of religious scoundrels. Plastic saints were a plague and a daily annoyance to the person and work of Christ. The epithets cast by Jesus toward these hypocrites were not plastic fingers, but “white=washed tombs” (Matthew 23:27)—clean on the outside but dead within.

Be aware that there is a special furnace in hell reserved for the hypocrites who tabernacle among the people of God.

**Woe    to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture! (Jeremiah 23:1a)**

**Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three \_witnesses. <sup>-29-</sup>  
\_Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, \_ counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, \_and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Hebrews 10:28-29)**

**For \_it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. (2 Peter 2:21)**

**\_Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of \_hell as yourselves. (Matthew 23:15)**

### **Look At Me Fasting**

In the text before us, Jesus is addressing one of the outward displays of piety common among the religious leaders of His day.

**Moreover, \_when you fast, do not be like the \_hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. <sup>-17-</sup> But you, when you fast, \_anoint your head and wash your face, <sup>-18-</sup> so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you \_openly. (Matthew 6:16-18)**

Since fasting (restraining from eating for a period of time for religious devotion) is not the point Jesus seeks to labor in this portion of His sermon, neither will I. Briefly, fasting is an acceptable and advisable practice among Christians. Fasting is not a magic trick which turns the arm of an otherwise reluctant God. Similar to kneeling, it can bring our hearts to humility:

**My clothing *was* sackcloth; I humbled myself with fasting. (Psalm 35:13b)**

But it doesn't always work that way.

***Why* \_\_have we fasted, '*they say,* ' and You have not seen?**

***Why* have we \_\_afflicted our souls, and You take no notice? '**

**☐ *In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, And \_\_exploit all your laborers.***

**<sup>4</sup>*Indeed you fast for strife and debate, And to strike with the fist of wickedness.***

***You will not fast as you do this day, To make your voice heard on high. (Isaiah 58:3, 4)***

There are many examples of good and legitimate fasting<sup>1</sup>, but fasting with a faithless heart is a stench in the nose of God—and that comes closer to what Jesus addresses here.

Jesus was surrounded by religious hypocrites who made a show of their religious practices, seeking to extract the prestige granted by the culture in which they lived. During their fasting, they would walk around with a sad (“Eeyore”) disposition. Their disheveled appearance spoke of their magnificent spirit, all designed to win the esteem of their flocks. Jesus taught that that esteem was the end of their reward, for certainly God remained unimpressed.

We are not to hammer shingles on our foreheads granting onlookers the benefit of the knowledge of our religious devotions. I don't doubt the sincerity of Christian leaders who make an outward display of their great works in order to be a good example to their followers. But it seems to me that some things are to be between the man and his Maker... and they are to go no further.

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<sup>1</sup>Observed on occasions of public calamities, \_2 Sam. 1:12\_; afflictions, \_Psa. 35:13\_; \_Dan. 6:18\_; private afflictions, \_2 Sam. 12:16\_; approaching danger, \_Esth. 4:16\_; ordination of ministers, \_Acts 13:3\_; \_14:23\_. Accompanied by prayer, \_Dan. 9:3\_; confession of sin, \_1 Sam. 7:6\_; \_Neh. 9:1\_; \_2\_; humiliation, \_Deut. 9:18\_; \_Neh. 9:1\_; reading of the Scriptures, \_Jer. 36:6\_. Habitual: by John's disciples, \_Matt. 9:14\_; by Anna, \_Luke 2:37\_; by Pharisees, \_Matt. 9:14\_; \_Mark 2:18\_; \_Luke 18:12\_; by Cornelius, \_Acts 10:30\_; by Paul, \_2 Cor. 6:5\_; \_11:27\_. In times of bereavement: of the people of Jabesh-gilead, for Saul and his sons, \_1 Sam. 31:13\_; \_1 Chr. 10:12\_; of David, at the time of Saul's death, \_2 Sam. 1:12\_; of his child's sickness, \_2 Sam. 12:16\_; \_21–23\_; of Abner's death, \_2 Sam. 3:35\_. Prolonged: for three weeks, by Daniel, \_Dan. 10:2\_; \_3\_; forty days, by Moses, \_Ex. 24:18\_; \_34:28\_; \_Deut. 9:9\_; \_18\_; Elijah, \_1 Kin. 19:8\_; Jesus, \_Matt. 4:2\_; \_Mark 1:12\_; \_13\_; \_Luke 4:1\_; \_2\_.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Swanson, J. (1994). *New Nave's*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems.

## Hypocrite

A parenthetical clarification might be useful at this point. A hypocrite is not a weak Christian. If you happen to see another Christian lose his temper driving down the freeway, this does not necessarily betray his hypocrisy as much as his impatience. Hypocrite was a dramatic term, where an actor would don a mask and pretend to be something he is not. I may be an unprofitable servant (Luke 17:10) but that doesn't mean I am not a servant at all.

## Treasuring Up Treasures

This all leads into the heart of the matter. These religious leaders treasured the esteem of their contemporaries more than the esteem of God.

**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal;<sup>-20-</sup>  
but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.<sup>-21-</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)**

This translation may miss the mark a bit. Literally, we are told not to treasure up treasures on earth. This is not a treatise against wealth: there are numerous examples of the wealthy playing valuable, necessary, and righteous roles in God's work.

Joseph advised Pharaoh to store up for the upcoming famine. Joseph of Arimathea was a "**rich man**" who provided a grave for Jesus (Matthew 27:57). People who don't make every effort to provide for their own households have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers (1 Timothy 5:8). The parable of the talents grants kudos to the industrious worker. Abraham, the father of the faithful, was a rich man (Genesis 13:2); and, of course, consider the ant who **". . . Provides her supplies in the summer, And gathers her food in the harvest."** (Proverbs 6:8)

We must also keep in mind that there are very few people (except for some Chinese who may hear this sermon) who don't fall into a category of 'rich' from a global standard.

## Things Are Temporary

Let us not miss the point. The point is not how much do you have, but what do you treasure? To the best of my recollection, I came to faith as a teenager: a time in my life when sports were everything to me, and I was pretty good at sports. Within one week of first attending a church service, I ripped my lower patellar tendon completely from my knee cap, thus functionally ending my athletic career.

For two years I couldn't run, jump, play, romp, or participate in those things in life that I enjoyed most and that were most valuable to me. It was an early and bitter lesson—a blinding flash of the obvious—that the things we have can be gone in a flash. And if your soul is tied up in those temporal things, then you're moored to a sinking ship.

And these earthly treasures can be precious to us. Isaac was precious to Abraham. His faith was tested by God. Would he be willing to give up that which was his most precious earthly possession?

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century a man, Horatio Spafford, lost his son and came to financial ruin in the Chicago fire. Later, Spafford would travel to Great Britain to participate in an evangelistic crusade. Due to some unexpected, last minute, business developments, he was detained in Chicago but sent his wife and four daughters ahead as scheduled. Shortly after, while crossing the Atlantic, all four of Spafford's daughters - Bessie, Annie, Maggie and Tanetta - died in a collision with another ship. Spafford's wife, Anna, survived and sent him what came to be a famous telegram which simply read, "Saved alone." Several weeks later, Spafford's own ship passed near the spot where his daughters died, at which time he wrote the hymn *It Is Well With My Soul*.

**The name of the Lord is a strong \_\_tower; The righteous run to it and are \_\_safe. (Proverbs 18:10)**

Would that be your testimony? Jesus mentions moths and rust, for these eat away at the things we possess. He could just as easily have mentioned cancer, automobile accidents, and heart attacks. These are on all of our calendars, and our Savior graciously warns us in advance that we should not set our cornerstones in the weak and

shifting sands of horizontal affections. Our souls belong to Christ and our hearts should be in heaven: **“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** (Matthew 6:21)

**Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: “\_The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. <sup>-17-</sup> And he thought within himself, saying, ‘\_What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?’ <sup>-18-</sup> So he said, ‘\_I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. <sup>-19-</sup> And I will say to my soul, \_\_“\_Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; \_\_eat, drink, *and* be merry.” <sup>-20-</sup> But God said to him, ‘\_Fool! This night \_\_your soul will be required of you; \_\_then whose will those things be which you have provided?’ <sup>-21-</sup>“\_So is he who lays up treasure for himself, \_\_and is not rich toward God.”** (Luke 12:16-21)\_

### Questions for Study

1. Discuss hypocrites among the people of God (pages 2, 3)?
2. Why did the Pharisee fast (pages 3, 4).
3. Is fasting something Christians should do (page 4)?
4. How should Christians view their own private devotional time with God (pages 4, 5)?

5. Is it a sin to be rich (page 5)?
6. What is Jesus' warning regarding treasures (page 6)?
7. Does this mean we shouldn't value earthly things?

