

John Piper: Money Is Dangerous

Let's talk about money. Jesus says:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy and where thieves do not break in nor steal, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21)

Jesus spoke more about money than He did about sex, heaven and hell. Money is a big deal to Jesus. There must be something really dangerous about money. He said, "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24).

My guess is a lot of rich people object immediately, saying something like: "No, it says the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Money is not bad." Excuse me? It is harder "for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God," period, not a rich man who loves his money. It is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Money is dangerous. If you have it and depend on it, it will kill you. If you don't have it and crave it, it will kill you. Money can kill us, because it reveals our hearts. My question is: What does it mean to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven rather than treasures here on earth? Let's see if we can get some help from Jesus.

Maximize God or Money?

Here is a story to be told. We're in Luke 12, where a man's crops have produced much more than expected. He said, "What shall I do, for I have no room to store my crops?" (Luke 12:17). His answer? "This I will do: I will pull down my barns and build greater ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods" (Luke 12:18). That is what I will do with all my accumulated wealth here at the end of the year when the stock market is going through the roof. What will you do with all your extra money, rich man? He's going to build bigger barns.

Then he says to himself, "Well, self, let's relax and eat and be merry for you have goods stored up for years to come." You fool. "This night your soul is required of you" (Luke 12:20). Then comes this crucial sentence in verse 21. "So is he who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21).

What in the world does that mean? "Rich toward God." I struggled with that for years. Surely it doesn't mean give God lots of money. He doesn't need any money. He has the cattle on a thousand hills (Ps. 50:10). No, being rich toward God doesn't mean to enrich God. I think it means count God as your riches. If you are looking about for where to be rich, focus on God. He is your great reward. He is your riches. Therefore, laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven would be living in such a way as to maximize God as your treasure. Handle your money in such a way as to show that God, and not money, is your treasure.

You Cannot Serve 2 Masters

Here is another word from Jesus about money. He says, "No one 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. You cannot serve God and money" (Matt. 6:24). What

does it mean to serve money? I think that will shed light on what it means to serve God. How do you serve money? You don't do what money says. Money is not talking to you, like a little dollar bill with a mouth on it saying do this or do that. To serve money means to calculate all of your behaviors, all of your life, to maximize what money can give you, always asking what benefits can come to you from money. That would be serving money. I think most people would probably agree with that.

So what does it mean to serve God? Don't bring in an alien meaning from outside this comparison. If you just stick with the comparison, serving God would mean doing everything you do, calculating all your behavior to maximize the pleasures you can get from God, all the benefits you can get from God in Christ.

You cannot serve God and money that way. Those are mutually exclusive. Either you are angling to make God your treasure in everything or you are angling to make money your treasure in everything. So lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven means to calculate all your behavior to maximize the benefits that you get from God, the benefits you have in God through Jesus Christ.

Sell Your Possessions

Lastly, let's look at Luke 12:32-34, one of my favorite passages to write about. It goes like this,

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms. Provide yourselves purses that do not grow old, an unfailing treasure in the heavens, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:32-34).

There's a connection between laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven (which we've already looked at) and selling your possessions and provide yourselves with purses or moneybags that don't grow old. You are to provide yourselves with moneybags and treasures that never fail, and you are to give to the needy. Jesus is saying: The second command is how you do the first. Sell your possessions and give to the needy, and thus (decide for yourself if inserting that word seems appropriate) provide for yourselves treasures in heaven.

I think the answer here of how you provide for yourselves treasures in heaven is that you take your money and you show your freedom from it. It is not your God. It is not your treasure. You love people, and you want people to love God, so you are displaying the love of God to them by sharing more and more of what you have. And in doing that, your joy in God, your treasuring of him, increases.

A Shepherd, a Father, a King

Jesus gives us a motive for that kind of lifestyle in verse 32, "Fear not, little flock." We tend to be afraid. We think if we give this much to the church or if this much to a ministry that cares for the poor, we may not have enough. Jesus says, "Fear not, little flock." And if he calls us a flock, what is he? God is our Shepherd. "Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's ... "—so now we have a Father and we have a Shepherd—"good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Now he is a King.

Jesus piles up pictures of God to take away our fear of giving and of laying up treasures in heaven. He is a Shepherd. He is a Father. He is a King. Shepherds know everything the sheep need to live, and provide for them. Fathers take incredible care with their children. Kings have authority and power to get it done. God is all of that for you. So don't be afraid. Be lavish, generous, cheerful givers. Treat God as your

treasure above all treasures, and then show how much He is your treasure by giving and giving and giving to those in need.

“Let your lives be without love of money, and be content with the things you have. For He has said: ‘I will never leave you, nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Heb. 13:5-6). Therefore, among all the people on the planet, may Christians be the most lavish, generous, free givers at great risk to themselves.