

Well good morning, and unless you're a visitor here (or have a memory like me !) you've probably worked out by now that we are working our way through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and today we come, again, to the theme of money and possessions.

Two thirds of Jesus' parables are to do with money because our love for it can cripple our life and destroy our relationship with Him. So he returns to it again and again.

Today we come to Matthew chapter 6v19, p971 of our pew Bibles where we encounter Jesus' second tranche of teaching on money and possessions

And I simply want to draw out three things from what Jesus says. He shows us

- 1) how money has the power to capture our heart;
- 2) how it has the power to blind us (to its lies, to our real need and to its grip on us); and
- 3) how Jesus is the key to free us.

How Money has the power to capture our heart, to blind us, and how Jesus can set us free. So firstly,

1) Money has the power to capture our heart.

In Matthew 6v19. 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 moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. "

Money has the power to capture our heart because it promises to give us the treasure we need.

A curate friend of David's recently went for a holiday in Switzerland where he was invited to dinner to a fabulously wealthy person's house. When the host and hostess met him, he said "they were the most beautiful people he had ever seen".

There he was in this wonderful house, in one of the most beautiful places in the world, looking at a perfect couple, with perfect children, tastefully surrounded by furniture and art as if from some fashion magazine – and it struck him as the evening progressed – why, they feel they have everything!

Money has the power to capture our heart because it promises to give us everything we need. Having money means we can live where we want, go where we want, eat what we want, wear what we want and do what we want.

If you want to be **significant** – money says it can deliver that:

It can get us "social status", membership of the most exclusive clubs, it can make us stand-out from the crowd

it can make us significant among all those who value wealth – which is most people.

If you want **power** – money says it can deliver that too:

with money, people will do what we want and we can get what we want
Money promises us: significance and power.

It promises us **security**

we can buy a house in the safest of neighbourhoods with high walls and security guards
we can buy the best health care in the world
we can buy the best comforts in the world
we can buy food and shelter and escape plans to protect ourselves from the chaos of the world
You and I know this - everyone in the world knows this.

This is a universal truth: significance, power, security, comfort –
money promises to get us these things.

And as such, Jesus tells us again and again and again, it is incredibly dangerous.

Because it can capture our hearts and we can love having it.

And we don't have to be rocket scientists to get this.

Money can capture our hearts

And when it does

2) It has the power to blind us.

it blinds us to the fact that it **lies** (it can't deliver what we need)

it blinds us to our **need of God**, and

it blinds us to the *extent* of its **grip in our life**.

Jesus says in v22

"The eye is the lamp of the body.

If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light.

But if your eyes are bad, then your whole body will be full of darkness."

What he is saying is:

if our eyes are working – then we can see what is going on;

we can see where we need to go; and

we have the ability to get there safely

But, if our eyes aren't working, if we are blinded
then everything we do is in the dark – and therefore

we won't see what is going on and

we won't see where need to go; and

we are likely to crash into people, fall into traps and wreck our relationships

When we think Money will bring us significance or power or security or lasting comfort
we become blind and we can expect our life to crash, to trip up, to be wasted.

Our love for money does this.

2.1 It blinds us to its lies.

Look, if money is the way we measure **OUR significance**

then the danger is that it becomes the way we measure other people's significance too.

If money is the way we measure **our** significance (and for many, many people this is true, their possessions, their house, their comforts make them feel successful) then people who make less money are therefore less significant.

For what is sauce for the goose has got to be sauce for the gander!

If we measure our own significance (our own success) in this way it then we will end up measuring other peoples significance and success this way too.

People who think they are something because they **have** something: are snobs, they look down on others, they judge with arrogance – and they are wrong!

Despite everything the world tells us: possessions are not the measure of our worth our significance, or success.

If we make money that which **powers** our decisions then the danger is that, in our jobs, we will maximise profits - despite

the hurt it may cause our workers or

the damage it may cause to the environment or

the injustice it may inflict on unknown strangers...

the justification: “it makes money for the shareholders”.

How much injustice has been perpetuated on the basis that it makes money?

If money powers the way we do our jobs –

we will never ask “is this right? “is this the way society should work?”, “is this what I should be doing with my life?”

We will end justifying hurting people (believing this lie) because we love making money.

If we think money will give us **security** we are not only short-sighted we are blind.

On Friday I was talking with a friend who said “my Father died at 42 when I was young and I remember him calling me into the room and saying

‘my darling don’t let anyone tell you this is what its all about –

I would trade it all to stay with you now’”

Money has the power to blind us to the questions

“why am I spending my life this way”

“why am I valuing myself and others in this way”

“why am I working for a company that is acting in this way”

“why am I spending my life on getting more of it in this way”

Do you see? Money has the power to blind us to its lies.

2.2 It also blinds us to our need of God.

Look,

If you’re looking for purpose then you’ll find it in the person who made you.

If you’re looking for significance then the only opinion which counts, the only approval we should need – is the one who calls us to be His child made to inherit the glory of heaven!

If you’re feeling afraid, then the power you need is found in God’s presence who makes us more than conquerors over everything even death itself.

For one day a trapdoor will open under our life and we will exit this world and

money will not save us - the only thing that will, will be the everlasting arms of our Father and that’s the only thing we will need.

David's friend stood in that Swiss Mansion amongst people **who did not see this** – they were blind to their need of God.

Do you see? Do you see??

Money blinds us to its lies.

It blinds us to our need of God; and

2.3 It blinds us to the extent to which it has us in its grip.

Carbon Monoxide is colourless, odourless, tasteless and it's deadly because it poisons us without us knowing what is going on.

If we're asleep, it will creep up on us and suffocate the life out of us before we are ever awake enough to do anything about it.

Jesus goes on and on about money because it does the same.

The problem with our love for money is that we don't see the problems growing in us, we don't recognise the extent to which its grip is spiritually stifling us.

You know, over the years people have come to talk with me about all sorts of struggles in their life. They talk about difficulties with relationships, with forgiveness, self-esteem, harmful habits – lots of things, but never once has anyone said to me –

you know Steve I am worried that I am too materialistic.

I focus on money too much!

It's never happened.

Look, we all variously struggle with things like lust, or selfishness, or truth telling, all of us struggle with something!

but how many of us are consciously struggling with materialism?

I think Jesus would say "Whoa... if you're not intentionally struggling with the grip of materialism in your life something must be very wrong!".

Jesus teaches us about it again and again.

He does it because we need struggle with it – to even see it!!

Look, if we're earning the same as everyone else then we don't consider ourselves rich;

but if we are earning less than the people around us – regardless of what we are actually earning - we feel under-paid!

This is crazy and this is true: I've worked in environments where one person could be earning £100,000 a year and rubbing shoulders with someone earning £2 million a year – and as a result they *feel* under-paid!

Its true!

And it's the same for you and me.

We live in the most wealthy part of the world – the West

We live in one of the most wealthy areas of England

We live in **THE** most wealthy time in the history.

Yet we don't feel rich!

70% of the world's wealth is in the hands of 5% of the world's people – and we are part of that 5%. Yet we don't feel rich – because we have become blind to it!

Compare our wealth with 2/3s of the world and we are privileged indeed.

Yet very, very few of us would call ourselves rich!

We may not see it, we may not feel it – but that doesn't mean to say it isn't true.
The Carbon Monoxide of Materialism is already in our blood stream and we don't see it.
Its got us in its grip and we don't see it

Otherwise we would regularly be asking ourselves
“hey given our riches
how can I be more generous?
where can I be more radical in my giving
what can I do to make **more** of a difference?

We'd be saying
do I need to buy this or can I make do and use the money for the glory of God?
should I buy a smaller house, skip the meal-out, do without those clothes and give the rest to serve God's
Kingdom?

We are not asking these questions, because we don't think we are rich, and we don't feel rich because money
blinds us to our wealth!
Do you see???

Money blinds us to its lies, to our need of God and to the extent of its grip in our lives.

So what can we do about it?

3. How do we break its power?

*In Lord of the Rings the story-line revolves around this one ring that promises so much:
power, fortune, fame – its all there for the taking.*

*But as the Ring Bearers begin to use the ring, they become used by the Ring
the more they possess it the more they are possessed by it*

They end up a shadow of themselves,

They end up calling it “their precious”, and

they serve IT rather than using it to serve them.

Jesus said v24

“no-one can serve two masters,

either they will hate the one and love the other; or

they will be devoted to one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and Money.

You cannot have Money “as your precious” and hope to treasure God.

You cannot love money and love God

You cannot treasure money and treasure heaven, at the same time.

And the more money is precious to you – the less God is.

You know, generally speaking (and praise God this isn't always true), but generally speaking the more money
we have, the less money we give away **as a percentage of our disposable income.**

That's incredible!

The more money we get the less we give away as a percentage of our disposable income

Very often relatively poor people give away a larger percentage of their disposable income than rich people!
You'd think the opposite would be true!

that rich people would find it easier to give away a larger percentage of their disposable income than poorer people but they don't because we tend to live right up (and sometimes beyond) our financial comfort zone and the disposable income gets spent on stuff.

Why is that ?

Because our love for materialism gets the first bite of the cherry.

How do we break its power?

Everybody gives up things to serve that which is precious in their life.

If "our precious is our family" – we will give anything to keep it. Yeah?

If "our precious is our career" – we'll sacrifice time and relationships to advance it

If "our precious is our car" – we'll lavish hours polishing it

everybody gives up things to serve that which is precious in their life.

The giving is both a **reflection** and a **reinforcement** of what we feel about this thing.

So if "Rugby is my precious" giving up time and money to watch it is both a reflection *and a reinforcement* of its priority in my life.

Both things are true!

Look at Jesus, what did he give to serve His Precious?

What did he give to serve you?

He was the King – he became poor

He was the Son of God - he became Son of Man

He was the Lord – he became a servant.

He willingly laid it all aside, gave it all away and died so that he might save those he considered precious.

And we will never truly break the power of materialism in our life until we see this.

until we see that Jesus sacrificed his treasure to make us his precious

until we realise that he looked at us and said "I will give anything, do anything, be anything to save you"

We will never truly break the power of materialism in our life until we see this

Because it is only when we see this

that we choose to place Jesus at the centre of our lives and use what we have to serve him.

How do we break the power of money in our lives?

We use that which was precious to us (money) to serve that which is **now** precious to us (Jesus).

You cannot serve two masters

So the Christian willingly make their former precious serve their new love.

We make our former god serve Jesus.

This is the only way to break Money's power.

and as we do so this, it both **reflects** and **reinforces** the presence of God in our lives.

Look, when Jesus placed us at the centre of his agenda –

he sacrificed everything for us
To place Jesus at the centre of our agenda is to do the same.

So practically what does this mean?

For most people, in most places, in most times the tithe is a good goal for our offering.
For most places it works, to give away 10% to the ministry of the Kingdom of God,
It's a nice round figure, its easy to do the maths and in comparison to what Jesus has done for us 10% doesn't sound very much.

But follow me on this...

for the rest of us, for those of us who have been Christians a few years now

let me say this...

we happen to live in the wealthiest time,

in the wealthiest 1/3 of the world,

in one of the wealthiest part of our country.

So that even "the poorest of us" lives in relative abundance to most people on earth.

Therefore in our relative abundance, our giving can be more

- 10% is a good rule of thumb

- it's a good opening introduction to reflect the love of God

- but it doesn't match the sacrifice of Jesus for us

Jesus gave everything, sacrificially for us.

A **proportionate** response would be to give everything sacrificially in return,

a **practical** response is giving that is sacrificial, that grows as we grow

So use your former precious (money) to serve the Kingdom of God as Christ gave to serve you.

Give sacrificially.

Money promises much but delivers little

It blinds us to its lies, to our need of God, to its true grip on our life

and perhaps for the first time you are seeing its grip on you.

Anyone who has ever seen Frodo or Bilbo in Lord of the Rings try to get rid of their precious sees how terrifyingly difficult it is.

They get angry even at the suggestion of giving it up, they make every excuse under the sun to keep it. It is terrifying!

- try to give away your former precious and see how much it has you in its grip!

So place Jesus at the centre of your lives, let him capture your heart.

Let his presence fulfil you more than all the applause of the world and all the treasures on earth.

Use your former precious to serve the Kingdom of God

You cannot serve two masters!

Sacrifice that which was precious to serve him who is.

Let your giving be both a reflection and enforcement of your love for Him

and see the Presence of God grow in your life

and watch him give you the ultimate sense of significance, purpose, power and security.