

How did you get on with serving people this week, 'in secret'? Was it easy to give up expecting to be noticed when we do something surprising for someone else?

Our Lent series is looking at a series of narratives which contrast the life that Jesus advocates and the narratives that influence us in popular culture. This week: 'learning to live without avarice (greed). Read Matthew 6: 19-24.

1. False narrative: Material Possessions or the Money to buy them Bring us Happiness.

- Back in 1973 the album 'The Dark side of the Moon' told us that money and possessions will bring you happiness, contentment, security, power, esteem and success: your life will be fulfilled.
- In 21st Century we are being bombarded with the same message: a shampoo for shiny hair will change our lives, we need that home burglar alarm or antibacterial soap, 'otherwise you'll be at risk'.
- We are used to thinking about greed: wanting more attention, food or pleasure than we need. But avarice is an insatiable desire for wealth or gain: it's always about money and possessions which bring us status and security, but only for a while, there is always something better on the horizon.
- It is also possible to be avaricious about saving: the spendthrift believes his savings make him happy, either way it's about more than money or possessions, it's about what money and possessions say about us and what we think they will do for us.

Q: Identify some events in your life which established your narratives in the area of money and wealth.

2. Jesus' narrative: Treasures in heaven. Matt 6: 19-20.

- In Jesus' time being wealthy meant you were blessed. Being poor meant you were being punished for some wrong-doing. 16 out of Jesus' 38 parables are about handling money and possessions.
- A wealthy 1st century Jew could do one of three things with his investments:
 - Clothes in rich materials could be stored – but moths could eat them away- to 'a collection of doilies'!
 - Grain could be stored in barns – but it could be 'eaten up' ('*brōsis*' translated rust) by rats and mice.
 - Gold could be buried under the floor – but a burglar could dig through your clay walls and steal it.
- Jesus sees materialism as a major barrier to Kingdom living and asks 'Where is your treasure'?

Q: Why do you think Jesus spent so much of His time talking about possessions?

3. Our Hearts need examining. Matt 6: 21.

- Jesus asks us to go deep and discover what we really treasure. Then we'll find out what our heart longs for: whether we are walking with God and following Kingdom values, or trusting in our own possessions.
- Are we easily distracted when praying or reading the Bible? **Q: Where is our treasure?**
- **Luke 12: 15-21.** The Rich Fool in the parable was materially rich but spiritually poor. **Q: What about us?**
- **Matt 6: 24.** If money (some Bibles say mammon: wealth) is your master then it becomes an idol/rival god
- **1 Timothy 6: 10.** It's not money that is the problem, it's the love of it and the desire for more.

4. How to align our hearts with Kingdom Values. 1 Chronicles 29: 14.

- Remember that we are stewards of everything God gives us and of all the resources available to us.
- Adopt a simpler lifestyle, uncluttered with material possessions: only buy what we actually need.
- Do the soul training exercise for this week which involves de-accumulation – see below.
- God is not against wealth or possessions as long as they don't rule our lives. Kingdom values challenge us to examine our hearts for where our treasure really is, for our priorities, for an answer to 'who is our master'? John Wesley lived on £28 pa even when earning much more: he just had more to give away!
- Joseph of Arimathea gave up his own tomb for Jesus' burial. He was rich but his was a Kingdom heart.

Verses 22-23: An eye which is 'bad/not sound/evil' signifies a covetous, stingy or niggardly disposition.

Soul Training Exercise: De-accumulation.

This week see if you can give five things away that would be of some value to five people: one a day. Not junk or tired clothes but say, one of three guitars you seem to have accumulated, or a nice pair of jeans, a good book in pristine condition; a tool you have but know someone else needs. Pray for the person you give to and avoid the temptation of buying replacements!

Questions throughout Chapter 9 of 'The Good and beautiful Life' by James Bryan Smith and on pages 242-244.