

“Where is your heart?” Mt 6:19-33

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. “Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Today we celebrate our Harvest Thanksgiving Service. And there is so much we need to be thankful for. We are a very wealthy nation. Do you know how wealthy we are? We are the wealthiest nation in the world. Never ever in the history of the world has any nation been as rich as we are.

That’s right! Twice as wealthy as, for example, Germans or Canadians or Japanese. And guess, who has the biggest houses in the world? Yes, we have. And, by the way, they are not empty, they are filled with luxury. How thankful we should be!

Do we work harder than other nations? No, according to statistics we barely make to top 30. Are we smarter than other nations? No, can we barely make to top 20. Do we deserve to be blessed with the wealth of this world more than others do? I don’t think so.

We, more than any other nation, are experiencing the blessings of our gracious heavenly Father. He indeed provides richly for all our daily needs. How grateful should we be?! How generous in our thanksgiving and in our giving?!

The question is – are we? Here is one more bit information. Australians are, indeed, #1 in the world when it comes to how much we give ... to whom? ... to lotteries and gaming. That’s right! And we are not just #1. We spend almost twice as many as the next nation, that is, Singapore. Isn’t that interesting? The more money people have, the more they crave for it?

This is exactly what Jesus was speaking about. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus didn't even speak to affluent Australians. He spoke to poor people of His time. But He knew well what spiritual power is hidden in money and possessions. It is amazing.

They are like a magnet. The bigger they get, the stronger they can pull our hearts towards themselves. The less we can resist. The more we have, the more we need to care for what we have. The more time it takes.

The more we have the more we need to protect what we have. The more security measures are required. More time, more money, more attention, and more of our hearts are attached to the treasures of this world, instead of Jesus.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Then Jesus says these threatening words: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.”

For us this language may not be as clear as to Jesus' listeners. They knew what slavery was, for that was a part of the world where they lived. If you belonged to your master, you had to obey and listen to him in everything.

You belonged to him with everything that you had. There was no way, it was impossible, that you could belong to someone else at the same time. Jesus uses this analogy speaking about wealth of this world and our commitment to Him as our Lord. There is no ... both ... and. There is only ... either ... or.

You can't serve both. And as you know well that is our affluence that is one of the main reasons why people turn away from true God. How many in our congregations alone have been enslaved to mammon and have turned away from Jesus? You can't serve both. It is either Jesus or mammon.

I recently had a conversation with a couple of good friends, perhaps they would consider themselves Christians; the same way that so many consider themselves Christians here in Barossa.

Somehow in our conversation we began to discuss how Christians look differently to everything this world. So, we got to the topic of money. Then I tried to explain how Christians are different when we think about money and possession. Remember how we said earlier in our creed?

“I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my limbs, my reason, and all my senses, and still preserves them; in addition [...] He provides me richly and daily with all that I need to support this body and life, protects me from all danger, and guards me and preserves me from all evil.”

Because that is God who gives us everything, there is no such a thing as my money or my possession. We look at what we have as something our God has entrusted to us, to provide for our daily need, yes, and to support the preaching of the Gospel. We are only stewards of His possessions.

What does this mean? For example, when we as Christians plan our budget, first we plan how much we will give to support the preaching of the Gospel. We look at what our generous God has given to us and consider...

How much we could give to support the work of our congregation, how much we could give to support teaching and preaching in countries where people don't know Jesus.

How much to support missionaries, to support translations and publishing of Bibles and others Christian books, how much we will give to support planting of new congregations, and how much we will leave to support other worthy causes that may come along.

Only then we plan what expenses we as family or individuals may have. That simple. Imagine, if we all lived this way, if this is how we dealt with money, how much we could achieve, how much support we could provide to those who bring the Gospel to this dying world!

Do we live this way? I have to say, that I struggle with it. There always seems to be something else, where our money goes. So easily... As I was telling how Christians look at treasures of this world, you could see a strange look in the eyes of my friends. Do you have to give to be a Christian? Is that a mandatory thing? How much do you need to give? How much is enough?

Do you know the answer? It is so simple. We don't have to give or to do anything else to earn God's favor, to receive His forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. All these most precious things in our life are given to us as gifts from our gracious and generous God.

These are the Good New, that Jesus has done everything needed so that we could receive God's Kingdom as free a gift of our Father. We don't need to buy it. Come and receive the Kingdom that was prepared for you before the creation of the world. It is yours!

But then why would you give your money away? Why don't you use it for yourself? We as Christians don't give it away. We give it to the one who loves us more than His own life. We use what we have, to express our gratitude to Jesus, and so that other could learn about this wonderful God as well.

For He has loved us first. He has showed and daily shows His love caring for us. He has made me and all creatures. He provides for me daily. He has redeemed me, not with gold and silver, but with His innocent sufferings and death, so that I could belong to Him and live with Him in everlasting

blessedness. That's our God! It was "Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich." (2Co 8:9)

God has loved us first, and He daily continues to care for us and to call us to Himself. And thanks to His love and care we are free to respond by trusting Him and serving Him with everything that He has given to us.

I need to confess, that for me it is easier to tell others how we as Christians should be handling what God has entrusted to us, than do it. It is so easy to forget about supporting the Gospel. It requires discipline to be faithful with money. And it is difficult not to serve money and possession.

Money and possession have such an important role in our society. I am sure you have noticed that people assign you value looking at your possessions, not at how much you have given to the Gospel, right?

We are not the first generation or nation to experience this problem. It is as old as the fallen humanity. This is, why Jesus speaks His comforting words to us: "Do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. [...] Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap... and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

You are children of your heavenly Father. He has revealed how important you are to Him. Now, if He provides even for the tiniest of His creatures, then how much more for you, who are members of His own divine family?!

Besides, if you do worry, does it help? Does it add anything good to your life? Of course, not. Therefore, instead of worrying, remind yourself who you are. Children of God, heirs of the Father and co-heirs with Jesus. He will never abandon you or forget about you and your needs.

"And why are you anxious about clothing? [For many this is quite a big thing, right?] Consider the lilies of the field ... even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field... will He not much more clothe you?"

"Do not be anxious ... your heavenly Father knows what you need. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

This is a wonderful tip that Jesus gives us. "Your heavenly Father knows what you need." He knows. He will provide, as He has done so far. Hasn't He? As we read in psalm a bit earlier: "He opens His hand and He satisfies the desires of every living thing."

“[Therefore] seek first the kingdom of God.” Everything we have belongs to our gracious Lord. He knows all our needs. And if we truly believe what we confess in our Creeds, we don’t need to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth.

Then we are free to use them for the sake of the Gospel, to show our love to Jesus. We can be thankful. We can be generous. We can surprise and shock others with our generosity. We can be prodigal in our giving and rejoice in it.

We can think first about all those many people who haven’t heard the Gospel of eternal life yet, and only then about our preferences. For we are children of our Father, and we know where His heart is, – with us. You are His treasure. He will provide. He always does.

I pray that we all would seek the presence of Jesus and the Kingdom of God first. For if Jesus is our treasure, our hearts are safe with Him, both now and forever. And nothing will separate us from His love.

Amen.