

THE PEOPLE ON FIRE

MATTHEW 6:19-24

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 destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and mammon.

In 1935, a schoolteacher in Rwanda, Africa - a man named [Blasio Kigosi](#) - was deeply depressed. He mourned the lack of enthusiasm in his church, and a lack of passion in his own Christian life.

Blasio took time off from his teaching, and retreated to a secluded cottage for a week of prayer and fasting.

His time alone with God changed Blasio's life. He returned to his home filled with the Holy Spirit.

Blasio immediately confessed his sins to those he'd harmed. He apologized to his wife and kids. He went back to school and proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus.

And revival broke out. Students and teachers were set ablaze with love for God. Blasio's converts were known by an African word "**abaka**" or "*people on fire.*"

A few weeks afterwards, Blasio was invited to an Anglican church in Uganda. Again, God poured out His Spirit, and revival sparked - just as it had in Rwanda.

Yet sadly, while in Uganda, Blasio became sick. He developed a high fever and died a sudden death.

Blasio Kigosi's ministry lasted only a few weeks, but the revival he helped spark swept across East Africa.

Its effects are felt even today. Hundreds of thousands of people were saved and transformed by the Holy Spirit through the mighty East African revival.

But it all began when a deflated believer in Jesus got tired of living an apathetic, uninspired Christian life, and sought the Lord. Blasio Kigosi lived the rest of his short life as *a passionate - on fire - follower of Jesus.*

And this is how God wants every Christian to live.

What an appropriate name, "**The Abaka**" or "*people on fire.*" I hope you want to be one of the **Abaka!**

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is describing **true righteousness** and **worship**. It's not just performance, but an attitude of the heart. It's a passion for God.

It reminds me of the church member who took his pastor to a college football game. After finding their seats, the pastor said, "**I hate football.**" His buddy asked him, "*Well, why in the world did you come?*"

The pastor answered, “I just love to be where people are excited about something.” Of course, that pastor’s comment was an indictment against his church.

Too many churches are like the church in Ephesus.

In Revelation 2:4, Jesus rebukes her, “I have this against you, that you have left your first love...” Their love for Jesus had grown cold. Their faith lacked fire.

God wants us to be fully alive. The rest of the world resembles *the walking dead - alive physically, but dead spiritually* - but God wants us animated by His Spirit.

Passionate living should mark every Christian.

But here’s the problem, we tend to wind down!

The other day I noticed that either my son, Nick, had grown a half-inch taller, or I had shrunk a half-inch.

He and I have always been about the same height, but he’s now definitely taller. And to be honest, I think it’s me. I’m afraid 57 years of gravity has taken its toll.

And there’s also such a thing as spiritual gravity.

Despite how tall we’ve stood in the past - *time*, and *life*, and *the world*, and *the devil* all combine to produce a drag on us spiritually. Gravity weighs us down. Our tendency is to *slump over* rather than *stand tall*.

This is why enthusiasm for Jesus is no accident. It’s the result of deliberate choices. Passion is cultivated.

The Abaka are people who kindle and stoke the fire.

So the question is, *how do we live like an Abaka? How do we stay on fire for the cause of Christ?*

In our text, Jesus provides us a roadmap for the heart. The path to passionate living starts at the **treasury** of our lives - *the storehouse - what we value.*

It winds past the **tower** of our lives - *the lookout - where we gain perspective... how we see our lives.*

And the road ends up at the **throne** of our heart - *the place where we bow - what or who we actually serve.*

Think of a road with three forks. When you reach the **treasury**, and the **tower**, and the **throne** - you have a choice to make... The **first fork** deals with our **goal**.

The **second fork** addresses our **gaze**.

The **third fork** exposes our **God**. Here's where life makes up its mind - where the road forks... **What's your goal? Where's your gaze? Who is your God?**

In Jewish folklore, there's the story of two men walking along life's road. It's nighttime. It's dark.

The first man can't see where he's headed - where the road goes. Suddenly, a storm flashes lightning. The foolish, *fearful* man looks up terrified of the lightning.

Whereas, a wise man is walking the same road. But when the lightning flashes his eyes looks down and ahead at the fork in the road that's being illuminated.

Perhaps God has sent you into a storm. Lightning is flashing around you, but God's intent is not to scare you. He's illuminating your path. He wants you to re-evaluate *your priorities, your perspective, your loyalty?*

As one man observed, “I’m sure that the bit of the road that most requires to be illuminated is the point where it forks.” And this morning, I want us to look at the forks in our road - *are we making right decisions?*

And the first fork in the road is by the **treasury!** What’s your treasure? What in life do you value most?

As Jesus says in verse 21, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” If you want a heart on fire for Jesus - a passionate, vibrant faith - identify your treasure. **Our heart is always tied to our treasure.**

And Jesus tells us that all treasure falls in one of two categories. In verses 19-20 He mentions both “treasures on earth,” and then “treasures in heaven.”

Everyone’s goal in life - their treasure - is either *material* or *spiritual* - it’s either *earthly* or *heavenly*.

If you want to live passionately for Jesus, here’s the first step - *value what’s spiritual and heavenly and eternal, not what’s material and earthly and temporal.*

Stay in hot pursuit of the right kind of treasure.

Understand, when Jesus tells us in verse 19, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth” He’s not making a plea for poverty. One of the most misquoted passages in the Bible is 1 Timothy 6:10. You’ve all heard it said, “Money is the root of all evil” - but that’s not how the Bible reads. 1 Timothy 6:10 is more exact. It reads, “The *love of* money is the root of all evil.”

Money itself isn't evil. Money, as well as all other earthly treasures - *whether fame, or friends, or career, or hobbies, or entertainment, or art, or sports* - are not intrinsically evil. It's all in how that treasure is used.

The Bible is full of encouragement to provide for our families. God promises to meet our needs. At times He even chooses to make us prosper. **"Materialism has nothing to do with the amount... but with the attitude."**

The Greek word that gets translated in our text as **"treasure"** is **"thesaurus."** In English a **"Thesaurus"** is **"a treasury of terms."** In the Greek the literal definition of **"thesaurus"** is to lay out a row of coins horizontally.

The implication is to stockpile, hoard, exhibit your money in an effort to show-off your wealth. A man lays out his coins in a row so everyone can count them.

Jesus is speaking - not of the man who obtains treasure to provide for his family - but the man who uses his treasure to impress others and exalt himself.

Notice verse 19, **"Do not lay up for yourselves..."**.

Comedian Jack Benny use to do a skit in his act.

A robber would approach him with a gun. It was a stick up. He demanded, **"Your money or your life?"**

Benny said nothing... so the thief yelled louder, **"Your money or your life?"** Finally Jack Benny replied **"Hold you horses, can't you see, I'm thinking it over."**

Tragically, for some people ***their money is their life.***

"What's your life? What's your treasure?"

If you inventoried your thoughts how much time would you spend thinking about material stuff?

Do you spend more time on E-bay or Amazon than on your knees? Do you follow the stock market, closer than you follow the Scriptures? *What's your treasure?*

Or maybe your treasure isn't money? It's could be golf, or football, or NASCAR - or you're into music, or video games - or it's the job, *you never take a day off...*

What's your treasure? What are your active goals?

God's concern is not **what you have**, but **what has you**. Are your riches of the earthly sort, or spiritual and heavenly? And there's a reason Jesus is so concerned!

For where your treasure is there your heart is also!

Think with me for a minute, in making an investment there are two criteria you need investigate. You want to **minimize your risk** and **maximize your profit**.

And Jesus would agree! With the few short years you have to live - make sure you invest your life wisely.

Jesus warns His disciples in verse 19, "**Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal...**"

Earthly treasure is **high risk**. It's vulnerable to bugs and burglars - rust and rot... In the ancient world there were no banks or stock markets, so often a person's wealth was invested in expensive **clothes**. A rich man would have his tailor weave threads of gold into his linen garments in order to show off his wealth.

And it was always humorous - ironic - to see one of these elaborate robes after the moths had taken a bite out of it - turned it into a rag. Its beauty never lasted.

Other people would invest their wealth in **grain** - yet storing it in the silos for long periods of time were always problematic. Decay could ruin a whole harvest.

Still other investors hid their wealth in **the walls of their clay houses**, or they'd buried it in their fields - but an able thief could sniff it out and dig it up.

And I hope you realize, in modern times earthly treasures are just as fragile. Nothing has changed.

Rather than *rust* we worry about a *bust*. Banks can fold. Businesses can fail. The economy can wilt.

Whether it's gas prices, interest rates, foreign trade, downsizing, outsourcing, inflation... there're a million moths that threaten your earthly investments. **Earthly treasure in any age is a high risk investment!**

And it's also low profit! Why fall in love with a boat, or house, or car - when one day it's all going to burn?

It's been said, "**If you don't want a broken heart don't trust in breakables.**" If it's not going to matter 10 years from now - let alone in 100 years - how valuable could it have been? Earthly treasure has a short shelf life.

But Jesus knows how easily a possession can become an obsession. *You tell me?* "**Does the fly have hold of the flypaper, or does the flypaper have hold of the fly?**" It's hard to tell. Earthly stuff gets sticky!

Tie your heart to spiritual, heavenly, eternal treasure, and you'll stay passionately in love with Jesus.

But flirt with the world - let your heart get attached to earthly, temporal stuff - no matter how noble it seems - and it'll end up destroying your passion for Jesus.

In the Star Wars movies, the evil Darth Vader was once a good guy, Anakin Skywalker. In an interview producer George Lucas described how it happened.

Lucas said, "He gets attached to things. He can't let go of his mother; he can't let go of his girlfriend. He can't let go of things. It makes you greedy. And when you're greedy, you are on the path to the dark side, because you fear you're going to lose things, that you're not going to have the power you need."

Treasure the wrong stuff and it'll destroy you.

The largest archeological dig in Israel is the ancient town of Bet Shan. It was a major city in Roman times, before it was destroyed by a colossal earthquake.

Once, during a tour our guide took us to the Temple of Dionysus. It was here that the archeologists found a skeleton of a hand clutching on to gold coins. It seems when the earthquake started he ran inside to grab the treasure, and he died when the roof caved in on him.

He died because he valued the wrong treasure.

Don't say it can't happen to you - it can! Check your heart. Track your treasure.
Here's the first fork...

What's your goal in life? What are you living for?

Your heart will always be tied to your treasure.

But the road doesn't end there... It weaves past the **treasury** to the **tower**. It's from the watchtower of life that I can get a good look - gain a strategic viewpoint.

For it's **my gaze** that ultimately determines **my goals**.

How I see life will direct what I treasure. *Perspective* decides *priorities*... *Outlook* determines *outcome*.

Read again verses 22-23, **The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!**

Recently, I went on the internet to shop for some sunglasses... My jaw dropped! Talk about sticker shock! Gucci glasses, with python frames, for just \$699. And that's a bargain, they retail for \$800...

I didn't know eyewear was so valuable!

But I should have... The lens through which you interpret life will determine the conclusions you draw.

Even if you've never been fitted for glasses - if you have 20/20 vision - we all sport some form of eyewear.

In fact, you're wearing *spiritual glasses* right now!

It's a fundamental principle - **where your treasure is your heart will follow**. But here's a second principle - **what you treasure will depend on your point-of-view**.

Here's an example... What if you and I went to clean out my garage. *There would be immediate conflict...*

Why do I have a bucket of old baseballs? My kids are all grown? *But you'd better not touch those baseballs. I'll use them one day with my grandkids.*

Or what about the yellow wooden stool with the blue smiley face. *Surely that's trash!* But I'd fight you for that stool. I built for my boys when they needed a little elevation to pee into the toilet. It has sentimental value. I'd sell the house before I gave up the pee-pee stool.

You get the point, "**One man's rags are another man's riches.**" Whether it's *trash or treasure - junk of jewels* - depends on each person's point-of-view.

Once, a fellow asked his next door neighbor if he would help him find their adjoining property line. The neighbor asked him, "**Is this for owning or mowing?**"

A person's particular perspective is everything.

I was following an automobile once that was owned by an obvious NASCAR fan. The car had a bumper sticker that read, "**I'm not speeding. I'm qualifying.**"

That's an interesting perspective. But I'm sure it isn't the police's point-of-view. Here's the point I'm making, our treasures are determined by our outlook.

And Jesus teaches us, there are really only two perspectives from which we can approach life - we see life from the *world's perspective* or *God's perspective*.

Your eye is either good or bad.

It's either full of light or full of darkness.

As the old saying goes, "**Two men looked out of prison bars. One saw mud and one saw stars.**" You can look up or down - listen to man or listen to God.

The world's perspective on life is summed up in 1 John 2:15-16, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - **the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life** - is not of the Father but is of the world."

Here's the world's definition of treasure... it values **what thrills the flesh - what grabs the eyes - what inflates the ego**... *acquisition, appearance, ambition.*

The world lives for whatever it is that makes you **feel great**, or **look great**, or **think you're great**.

God's perspective is just the opposite. **He prizes the *spiritual* over the *physical* - the *internal* far above than the *external* - the *eternal* instead of the *temporal*.**

In OT Israel God placed a living, walking, talking memorial to His value system among His people.

The Hebrew word "**nazir**" means "*to dedicate,*" and the Nazirite was a man who dedicated himself to God in a special way... His vow amounted to a point by point attack on the world's values. It clarified holy living. He was a walking billboard for God's priorities.

The vow of the Nazirite was three-fold... He wasn't to eat grapes or drink wine - a razor was to never come upon his head - nor was he to touch anything dead.

You'd never find a Nazirite in a *liquor store*, a *barber shop*, or a *funeral parlor*. And all three get heavy traffic.

God instituted the Nazirite to make a statement. Life is more than ***feeling great, looking great, being great.***

Real joy isn't produced by *distilled spirits*, but in the *Holy Spirit*. Deep pleasures are *spiritual* not *physical*...

Real beauty isn't found in a person's *hair*, but in their *heart*. It's *integrity* not *image* that gives a life value...

And every mortuary is a reminder that meaning isn't found on earth, but in eternity. G Campbell Morgan once put it "[Measurement of a man's worth cannot be made at the point where blue sky kisses green earth.](#)" It's God's approval, not earthly glory, that matters.

So, there're two perspectives... The world measures what's important by *the material, and external, and temporal*. While God measures what matters by putting the tape around *the spiritual, and internal, and eternal*.

And these two perspectives are like sunglasses.

The tint of the lens decides the color of all that you see! The lens you wear determines how you see life.

You've heard the expression "[rose-colored glasses.](#)"

Well, each of us is wearing either *world-colored glasses* or *God-colored glasses*! Is your outlook tinted by what the world values, or by what matters to God?

And it's the color of your lens that ultimately dictates what you'll treasure in life. *Our gaze sets our goals.*

In verse 22 Jesus appeals to human anatomy. "[The lamp of the body is the eye.](#)" The eye is the portal, the opening, that receives and filters light into my body!

He continues, “If therefore the eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.” If your eye has 20/20 vision it will allow you to see *clearly, detect obstacles, judge proportion, measure distance, perceive color.*

If the eye is good the whole body will benefit.

Yet in verse 23, Jesus counters, “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.”

If your eye has 20/600 vision, it'll cause the whole body to go bump in the night - even in the daytime.

A dim eye places the whole body at a disadvantage.

And your perspective is like your eye - it's the portal that receives and filters light into your soul and spirit.

And the shade of the lens that tints your perspective will affect all of your life. The color of my viewpoint - my eye - will determine how I live, and what I treasure.

If I'm wearing **God-colored glasses**, or as Jesus puts it in verse 22, “If therefore, my eye is good,” then I'll see life as God sees it. I'll be able to discern His will.

My life will go better if I wear *God-colored glasses*.

Downhill skiing through a forest may sound like a death wish to some folks, but there are skiers who love the thrill of cutting through a stand of aspens, while kicking up some snow. The key is to not hit the trees.

Expert skier, Tim Etchells gives some advice to these thrill seekers, “What you focus your eyes on becomes more critical in the woods. Look at the spaces *between*

the trees - the exits where you hope to be traveling. Don't stare at what you don't want to hit..."

This is what God-tinted glasses let us to do - *to focus on the spaces*. Ski around the temptations of this world and trust the Spirit of God to fill our hearts with joy.

The trees are the tangibles of life. The stuff we can see. And we're tempted to focus on the visible. But we need to aim for the the open spaces. Look for what we can't see - spiritual joys and guidance. Look for God.

For if I persist in wearing *world-colored glasses* - or as Jesus put it, "If my eye is bad," all I'll see are the trees. My perspective on life will be based on *physical factors*, and *outward appearances*, and temporal glory.

With that perspective every judgment I make will be warped and distorted. I won't see what God sees.

It's said, "False seeing is worse than blindness." Sometimes it's better to be blind and admit it, than to see with blurred vision and think you're seeing clearly.

Once, a little old lady desperately wanted to get married, but she had a shortage of illegible candidates.

One day she was attending her garden club where she met what seemed to be a very nice man. She was extremely interested in this gentleman and asked a friend where he was from. Her friend said, "*Well, for the last 20 years he's lived in San Quentin prison.*"

The lady responded, "O really, why was he there?" Her friend said, "*He was convicted for killing his wife.*"

The lady breathed a sigh of relief, "O good! That means he's single!" A jaded perspective is very dangerous.

A bad eye allows me to see only what I hope to see.

This is what Jesus means at the end of verse 23, "If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" If what I'm seeing is false - if my eye, my perspective is faulty - and I see only what I would want to see - then my sight is worse than if I was blind.

Here's **another fork** in the road... Are you wearing **God-colored glasses** or **world colored glasses**?

Passionate living involves perspective. How I see life will determine what I consider to be life's real treasure.

So here's where we're at...

Verses 19-21 teach us that **our heart is tied to our treasure**. Verses 22-23 teach us that **our treasure is determined by our perspective**. Now in verse 24 we learn **our perspective is finally decided by our Master**.

Here's an easy way to remember it... our heart is attached to our **goals** - but our *goals* are shaped by our **gaze** - and our *gaze* is determined by our **God**.

If you're looking for a bottom-line, here it is, "**The condition of our heart is dependent on the person or thing that rules it!**" *And everybody serves somebody!*

In verse 24 Jesus brings us to **the final fork**... We all choose who it is we'll serve! "**No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or**

else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

When God created us He made us worshippers.

We all desire to be part of something bigger than ourselves. We're drawn to an altar. Every heart has a **throne**, and on that throne sits a master of some sort.

This is what caused the ancients to worship the sea or stars - or carve out gods from sticks and stones.

This is what drives modern people today to strip off their shirts and paint their torso the color of their favorite sports team - then sit in a snowy cold stadium all afternoon and scream at the top of their lungs.

Did you know the word “**fanatic**” is from the Latin, “**fanum**,” which means “*temple*.” The term “**fanaticism**” described “*the emotional frenzy inspired by a deity*.”

Could it be that the allegiance we show our football team is related to our primal role as a worshipper?

Probably so! Whatever it might be - people get lost without something in their life to believe in... Even if we believe in ourselves... *Self-worship*, is the most hollow form of worship, yet it is perhaps the most popular.

All people want a god to serve - *a false god* perhaps, *a puny god*, *a silly god*, *a destructive god* - but a god nonetheless. People can't live without one.

Augustine prayed, “**God, You have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.**” Every actor has a director, every soldier has a commander... *and every servant has a master!*

As I said, **everybody serves somebody!**

And the point Jesus makes in verse 24 is you can't worship multiple masters! You can have two jobs, or various hobbies - but you can't have *two gods*. The throne that sits in the human heart is a one-seater. The top rung of our lives has room for only one occupant.

It reminds me of a Tennessee cotton farmer. When the Civil War erupted he couldn't choose sides. His allegiances were split - he had friends both North and South. So he wore *a gray jacket and some blue pants*.

One day he was caught in a skirmish. This was not his fight, so he walked out in the middle of the battlefield and declared his neutrality. *You know what happened...* Union sharpshooters saw his gray jacket. Confederate marksmen saw his blue pants. He got shot at from both sides. *You can't serve two masters!*

Perhaps some of you are wearing *the Christian's jacket*, but *the world's pants*. You're playing both sides.

You've tried to preserve your neutrality. You're friendly with both camps. *Trust me, it won't last long.*

Here's another **fork** in the road... Some of you know God loves you and you want to love Him in return, ***“but I can't get branded “a Jesus freak” - it'll limit my social or business opportunities”*** - so you play both sides.

Beware! There's an African proverb that puts it, ***“The man who tries to walk two roads will split his pants.”***

You won't enjoy either side. Try to straddle the fence, and you'll become a *sorry sinner* and a *miserable saint*.

Jesus said, "he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other." He won't please either Master. The world wants your whole heart. It sucks you in more and more.

And neither is Jesus content with half-heartedness.

James 4:4 puts it this way, "Do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God." I hope you realize that *a dual devotion is no devotion at all*.

Recall the story Jesus told of the rich, young ruler.

He wanted to follow Jesus, but when Jesus told him to sell all his belongings, he walked away sad.

It wasn't that he didn't want Jesus, but there was something he wanted more. His love for Jesus had a rival. There was another master vying for his loyalty.

I once heard of a young man expressing his love to his sweetheart. He said, "Honey, I'm not as wealthy, and handsome, and I don't have a mansion and a Mercedes like Gerald Green, but I love you so much!"

The girl replied, "*Well, I love you too, but can you tell me more about this Gerald Green?*" Is there a Gerald Green in your life? You say you love Jesus - but is there a contender for your allegiance? *Is there something in your life that's more important than God?*

One author writes, "Christ will put up with a great many things in the human heart, but there is one thing He never tolerates... **and that's second place!**"

None of Jesus' followers ever serve Him perfectly. Either we *lag behind* or *get ahead*. But we need to embrace the basic relationship... **He's our master!**

CS Lewis once said, "**Every conversion is the story of a blessed defeat.**" A Christian is the person who submits to God's authority, in exchange for His mercy.

The Lord *won't save* who he *can't command*. That's another way to say, "**No one can serve two masters.**"

Joshua and Caleb were the only two Hebrew spies who believed that God would give Israel victory over the giants in the land. He lived his whole life by faith.

Just before he died, the elder Caleb surveyed his life, and declared, "**I wholly followed the Lord my God.**"

This is what I hope I can say at the end of my life.

That I refused to be distracted by lesser loyalties... that My devotion wasn't diluted or divided... that I was never a part-time Christian... *that God had all of me!*

Do you want to be one of *the Abaka* - a people on fire for God? There're three forks in the road... **at the treasury, at the tower, at the throne...** There're three choices to make... **your goals, your gaze, your God...**

A person's heart is always tied to what we treasure.

Our treasure is determined by our point-of-view.

And our viewpoint is decided by our God.

It's at the fork in the road that life makes up its mind. *Let's decide to live our lives passionately for Jesus!*