

April 15, 2012  
 First Baptist Vancouver

Text: Matthew 6:19-34

Title: "Anxiety: Some Causes and Cures"

(Series: Following Jesus Into His Sermon on the Mount)

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"You know my heart." The song the choir has just sung for us, composed in 2007, was inspired by another song composed hundreds of years before Jesus came into our world. The ancient song inspiring the contemporary song is Psalm 139. Psalm 139 is at once an affirmation of what God has **already done** and a pray for God to do an **even deeper work**. The affirmation: "O Lord, You have searched me and known me." The prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart." You know my heart. Now take hold of my heart and make it all you want it to be. "Search me and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any way of pain in me, and lead me in the everlasting way."

As we continue following Jesus into His Sermon on the Mount, we come to the section where He answers that prayer! He answers the prayer because He knows my heart. The Preacher on the Mount, knows my heart. The Preacher on the Mount knows your heart. The Preacher on the Mount knows the human heart. More fully than anyone else. More intimately than anyone else. And in the section of His Sermon we will read today, He tells us things about our hearts we would have never figured out for ourselves.

Here the **Chief Cardiologist** opens up mysteries of the human heart we would have never discovered on our own. This is one of my most favorite texts to preach for the simple reason that is it one of the texts I most need to hear!

On first reading, Matthew 6:19-34 appears to be a series of loosely strung together wisdom-sayings, much in the vein of the book of Proverbs. On first reading it appears that Jesus first speaks about treasures, then moves on to the matter of vision, and then on to serving masters, and then to the issue of anxiety, and then calls us to look at the birds and consider the lilies of the field, and finally calling us to seek first the kingdom of God. On first reading there does not seem to be any inherent connection between His words about treasures, vision, masters, anxiety, birds and flowers, the kingdom and righteousness of God.

But ... on further reading ...you discover that the whole text is carefully crafted around one main point. Let me show you what I mean.

In His teaching on treasures, vision and masters, Jesus is working with three intertwined 'movements of the human heart.' I thought of using the term "law" – that Jesus is working with thee deeply intertwined "laws of the human heart". By "laws" I would not mean something imposed on the human heart from outside, but rather something inherent

to the human heart. Like gravity and electro- magnetism, these laws are built into the fabric of our being. But because the term “law” is so closely related to “legalism”, I choose the term “movements.” Jesus is working with three sub-terrestrial “movements of the heart”. Movements which we would not have known about had Jesus not revealed them to us. Each of these “movements” has intensely practical implications for every moment of every day.

In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus brings these three “movements” together around one main point. It is this: the sign that we are not paying attention to these “movements of the heart” is anxiety or worry. The sign was that we are not making wise decisions relative to these three “movements of the heart” is anxiety and worry – that uneasiness, apprehension, distress... that manifests itself in restlessness or uptightness or loss of perspective or even fear...a condition that slowly chokes vitality out of our lives.

In the text Jesus – the smartest person who ever lived – is telling us that worry is a symptom – the dominant symptom – of making unwise choices relative to fundamental movements of the heart. Where do we find this main point? In the “therefore” of verse 25. “therefore, I tell you, do not worry about you life.” You have heard me say many times what many Bible scholars tell us: whenever we come across a “therefore” in a sentence we are to ask, ‘what is the therefore there for?’

Matthew 6:25 – “Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life...”. There “therefore” is “there for” to point back to what proceeds; the “therefore” is “there for” to point us back to Jesus’ teaching on treasures, vision and masters. Jesus is telling us that anxiety – worry – is rooted in unwise decisions we are making regarding treasures, vision and masters. Freedom from such anxiety will come back by making wise decisions.

So.. let us go back through the text and listen to Jesus from this framework. Three fundamental “movements of the human heart”. Before we do .. A word about the kind of anxiety Jesus is addressing in His Sermon. He is not addressing the clinical conditions we call “anxiety disorder”. The kind of anxiety rooted in traumatic experiences either in childhood or later in life. Not post-traumatic stress disorder. Jesus does bring healing for such anxiety. And that He says in the Sermon on the Mount can bring some message of freedom. The kind of worry Jesus is speaking about is Matthew 6 is low-grade anxiety that makes this moment in history. Especially in our part of the world.

Such anxiety is rooted in making unwise decisions relative to three fundamental “movements of the human heart”.

Movement one, verse 19-21. Every human being is a “treasurer”, an investor. Every human being, every one of us, consciously or unconsciously, is looking for, and investing in some sort of security against the uncertainty of tomorrow. Tell me about it Jesus! Jesus literally says “Do not treasure treasures for yourselves on earth, but treasure treasures for yourselves in heaven”.

Movement one, we all treasure treasures. Notice that Jesus does not criticize us for doing so; He does not tell us not to do so. Investing in securities against the uncertainties of the future is not a sin. It is constitutive of our humanity in the real world.

Furthermore, notice that Jesus does not say, “do not treasure treasures for yourself”. Some readers of the text focus on the phrase “for yourselves” and then suggest Jesus is talking about being selfish. But notice – the phrase “for yourselves” is in both clauses – with treasures on earth and treasures in heaven. He expects us to treasure treasures for ourselves. The issue is where...in the bank?

May I put it this way? Jesus is not saying that our problem is that we are being selfish. He is saying we are being foolish. More. Jesus is not saying we are too selfish. He is saying that we are not selfish enough! It is an inherent movement of the heart to treasure treasures. “Treasure treasures for yourselves” says the Lord of Life. Just be wise. Put them in the right bank.

Then Jesus tells us what we would never have deduced. Our hearts follow our treasures; our hearts follow our investments. “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”. Note the order: Not treasures follow the heart but the heart follow the treasure. The Message paraphrase Jesus’ words this way: “The Place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being. Our hearts follow our treasures.”

Now in the Bible the term “heart” means more than the organ that pumps blood. In the Bible “heart” refers to the control centre of our lives. The heart is the ??? not only of the emotion, but also of the will; the heart is the place where all the data of life is sorted out, and major decisions are made. Jesus is telling us – the control centre of lives follow our investments.

So which will it be? Treasure treasures for ourselves on earth? Or treasure treasures for ourselves on heave? “On earth” and “In heaven” do not refer to so much to physical locations as they do to the kinds of investments. “On earth” means the things of earth, the things of human-made society, the type of human society organizing itself without any reference to God. “In heaven” means the things of heaven, the things of God, the things of God’s great purpose on earth.

You can see then that the issue is durability. Jesus is making explicit what we all implicitly know but seldom allow ourselves to ace – namely, that the things of earth are profoundly insecure. Tell us about it Jesus! “Do not treasure treasures for yourselves on earth where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal” Thieves like Bernard Mardoff, or other unnamed financial wizards who steal other people’s investments. Here Jesus is simply helping us be realistic. All treasures of earth – however good – are subject to corrosion of one sort or another. My friend Dale Bruner says, “the moth represents nature’s corrosion eating away; the rust represents times corrosion eating away; the thief represents humanity’s corrosion eating away” (The Christbook, 260)

Have you ever noticed that the more we have of what we think makes us secure the more we feel strained to protect it? Why is this? We buy all the “stuff” that is supposed to make us feel secure..and then but expensive “security systems” to protect what is supposed to make us secure. Why? Because our hearts implicitly know but dare not admit that all earthly securities are insecure against nature’s corosians, times’ corosians and humanity’s corosians.

Jesus tells us investors that there is only One big safe investment – the things of heaven, the things of the Living God, which cannot be taken away by moth or rust or thief; war or flood or fire or earthquakes or financial collapse or revolution or death.

Movement two, verses 22-23. In every human being has a vision of reality. Every one of us looks out at life from a frame of reference. Every one of us acts and reacts from a set of deeply held presuppositions about basic mke-up of the world. We may not be able to name the pr-suppositions, but they are there. Reflected in the way we treat people, spend time, spend money.

Or as you may he heard me say many times: we all wear glasses. A set of glasses given to us by our parents, our cultures, our experiences, the books we have read, the movies we have seen. Here is what we would never have figured out on our own: or glasses, our vision of reality, affects the whose of our lives. “the eye is the lamp of the body,,: says Jesus. “If your eyes are good – sound, single, clear – your whole body will be full of light.” But if the eyes are ‘bad’ – not sound –our whole body will be full of darkness. Although Jesus’ words are literally true – what we let into our physical eye affects our physical body – Jesus is speaking metaphorically. What we fix the ‘eye of our heart” on; that is, what we allow to influence and occupy the control centre of our lives, determines everything else about us. As E. Stanley Jones used to say, “what gets your attention, get you” (224, S/M)

We become like that upon which we form our vision. Either we focus on the things of the Light of the world and be filled with light, or we focus on the things out of sync with the light, and be filled with darkness. And as we all know it is very different to feel secure in the darkness.

Movements three, verse 24, every human being serves some sort of master; that is every human being serves some sort of god. As someone once said, “the human species Is incurably religious”. Fold singer Bob Dylan wrote a song that hauntingly sings this inherent movement of the human heart – “Gotta Serve Somebody” – for which he won a Grammy Award.

You may be an ambassador to England or France  
 You may like to gamble, you might like to dance  
 You may be the heavyweight champion of the world  
 You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls.

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed  
 You're gonna have to serve somebody,  
 It may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
 But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

You may be a construction worker working on a home  
 You may be living in a mansion or you might live in a dome  
 You might own guns and you might even own tanks  
 You might be somebody's landlord you might even own banks.

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes  
 You're gonna have to serve somebody,  
 Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
 But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride  
 You may be a city councilman taking bribes on the side  
 You may be working in a barbershop, you may know how to cut hair  
 You may be somebody's mistress, may be somebody's heir.

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes  
 You're gonna have to serve somebody,  
 Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
 But you're gonna have to serve somebody.

Birds fly in the air, fish swim in the sea, and human beings serve some sort of master, some sort of god. Even if that god is one's self. You may have heard the saying: "He is a self-made man who worships his creator."

And here is what we would have never figured out on our own. Jesus says "No one can serve two masters", two god. "you cannot serve both God and Mammon". Note that the word "cannot". Jesus does not say "you should not serve two masters". Jesus does not say "your must not serve two masters". He says, "you cannot". It simply is not possible.

This is brought out in the word Jesus uses – "masters". Not "employers", but "masters". We can serve two – or more- employers. But we can only serve one master. We can be slave of only one master at a time. "Single ownership and fulltime services are of the essence of slavery", says one NT scholar (RVG Tasker Matthew, 76)

Or, so God puts it in the first of the Ten Commandments: "I am Yahweh, You God, Who brought you out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me" (exodus 20: 2-3) "There shall be no other gods between us". The implication being we can have only one god at a time: either the true Living god, or some other God who is coming between us and the true Living God. "No one can serve two masters...you cannot

serve God and Mammon". We try...more than we care to know. But it does not work, says Jesus, for it cannot work.

"Mammon" I understand why many translations render it as "money". For in the world out of which most translators come, money is mammon. Hugely so. A master ..taking up huge amounts of our time... taking up huge amounts of space in our heads. Money is not a neutral inanimate object. Money takes on real power, real spiritual power. It becomes a real god. And the more we have of it, the greater the potential to become its servant, its slave.

So I understand why some render "mammon" as "money". The word "mammon" is derived from the word "amon" related to "amen". Now "amon" means "that in which one trusts." "Mammon" is anything or anyone other than the Living God, in which, in whom, we put our trust.

Or more specifically: "Mammon" is anything or anyone in which, in whom, we think we have hope for the future. For some "mammon" is money. For others "mammon" is marriage. Or children, or grandchildren, or career, or ministry or giftedness. The list goes on and on.

Most "mammons" are, in and of themselves, good. Some very good. They have to be good or at least appear to be good or we would not be inclined to put our trust in them. So Jesus is not judging or condemning "mammons". Indeed, He Himself has given some of them to us" spouses, children, jobs, homes. He is telling us something about our hearts we would have never figured out on our own. It is impossible to serve.. to give total allegiance to the Living God and any mammon.

Look at it this way. Think of our hearts as a circle. A circle can have only one centre, right? A circle cannot have two or more centres. A circle can be full of all kinds of other things...but it has only one centre. So, too, our hearts; our hearts can have only one centre. Only one central devotion. Our hearts can love many things and many people. But our hearts can have only one all-encompassing centre. You can see then that Jesus is paying us a huge compliment. We are the creatures who are so wonderfully created that only the Living God can be the centre, Only the crucified and risen Saviour can be the centre. Any other candidate for the centre is beneath our created dignity.

You can also see that we are all always on the verge of idolatry. Idols need not be made of wood or stone or gold. Indeed, the most powerful idols are not even visible.

I have found it helpful to periodically ask myself a number of questions. I think of them as "idol indicators" or "mammon detectors" .

Five searching questions:

- 1) What give me a sense of security? As I look out on the turbulent world and the unknown future, what makes me feel secure? Any answer other than "Jesus Christ" is a potential mammon-idol.

- 2) What is my greatest delight? What brings me the greatest joy? Any answer other than “Jesus Christ” is a potential mammon-idol. This is not to say that we are not to find joy in anyone or anything else. Hardly, for again, many of the things...and many of the people... we find joy in have been given to us by God. It is just that the things or persons cannot finally satisfy our hearts. And if we put the things or persons at the center we will try to squeeze out of them what they cannot deliver. Nothing and no one other than the Creator: redeemer Himself can bear the weight of our quest for joy.
- 3) What do I fear? Fear is always a good clue to the false god. Primitive idols were often the projectors of what the people feared. What do you fear? Follow the fear..it leads to mammon in which, in whom, we have invested too much authority.
- 4) Where do I resist God’s “word”? What parts of the Bible or what themes of the Bible do I resist? My resistance may be due to the fact that God’s word is threatening an idol somewhere.
- 5) A sensitive one. “What is it which if God took it away I would walk away from Him?”

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At the beginning of our Service today we sang the lines: “prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love; here’s my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for Thy courts above.” Prone to wander .... and therefore to worry. Here Jesus, here is my heart. Take and heal it.