

## Jesus on the Fat Hill – Matthew 6:19-21

At Ocean City, MD on the board walk, there are a ton of games and activities that can keep you from going down to the beach. In fact, I remember one game where you had to keep your eye on the ball...

Jesus is asking us to keep our eye on the ball. To look where God is asking us to go and go there. To put our trust in His leading, rather than our own wants and desires. We have been studying the Sermon on the Fat Hill, or in your Bible, it is called the Sermon on the Mount. After describing how we should give, pray, and fast, Jesus switches the focus. He knows that the world is pretty tempting. He knows that the world can seem like something you should invest your whole life into. Jesus knows that the American Dream of wealth, power, family, a great home, two cars, and a large bank account can take our eyes off the ball.

Jesus does not want us to take our eyes off the ball. He wants us to each know where we stand in life. Jesus wants us to know where we stand with temptation in our lives.

When we think of temptation, typically the first two areas that come to mind are lust and pride. While those are really deadly there is another that may have wrought more damage for both men and women in our culture (and even in this room). The problem is that it's not as obvious and blatant, in some ways it is easier to hide and, in our affluent culture, it has become more acceptable.

I'm speaking of materialism, greed, and envy. These areas are so important to avoid that God concluded the Big Ten, the Ten Commandments, when He told us in the tenth commandment, "thou shall not covet." God was serious about the temptation of materialism.

Jesus wants us to get serious about following Him and He knows it would be easy for greed to get in the way. Turn with me to Matthew 6:19-24. Here in this passage, Jesus gives us three tests to help us deal with materialism, greed, envy, and coveting.

You see, this message is not about tithing, or about how much our church needs your money. This is a message about what Jesus said our material possessions can do to us if not handled properly.

People are willing to confess many things. In fact, I have seen people confess that they've committed adultery, or that they're addicted to something, or that they no longer believe in God...but I have never had a person brokenheartedly confess "I'm greedy." That is because we tend to look at materialism and greed on kind of a sliding scale. In fact, some believe that greed is not as bad as offending people. It's almost

become an acceptable sin for Christians. Perhaps that's why it's so deadly and perhaps that is why Jesus wants us to focus on it today.

Let's look at the tests that Jesus wants us to use to see how we are doing in following Jesus.

### **TEST #1: THE HEART TEST – READ Matthew 6:19-21**

Jesus tells us to take a look at your heart. You see, your heart is the core of your very being, your real inner person. Your heart is the source for your spiritual, emotional, and psychological well being. Jesus wants us each to take the heart test and ask ourselves where our hearts are.

We each need to realize that what we treasure, will determine our heart's condition. Do we treasure God's priorities or do we treasure what the world thinks is best?

The world will tell you that wealth and power and popularity are what you should treasure. The world will tell you that the wealthy are better off. In fact, some believe that wealth can determine how close we are to God. We see someone and think, "wow, they have everything. God must really love them." Jesus reminds us, however, that wealth is not the determination of one's spiritual standing before God.

Too often the wicked prosper - Jeremiah 12:1 - *You are always righteous, O Lord, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?*

We need to realize that just because someone possesses a lot of material things, does not mean that they are really living a life that God wants them to live. Jesus wants us to take the heart test so that we will focus on what we treasure rather than what we possess.

Our culture today wants us to focus on what we possess. We are consumed with consuming. We must have the latest, the fastest, the newest, the biggest or the smallest, the costliest, and the "coolest."

But the next time you reach for your credit card or your checkbook, ask yourself, "Am I stocking up on possessions or treasures?" So often we confuse the two. We see luxury cars, elegant clothes, gorgeous houses and expensive electronic equipment as the treasures in our lives. They are not.

What is the difference between stocking up on possessions and having treasures?

You possess a job ... You treasure your family.  
You possess a house ... You treasure your home.

You possess a bank account ... You treasure your friends.  
 You possess a car ... You treasure your freedom.  
 You possess a great wardrobe ... You treasure your health.  
 You possess an appointment book... You treasure your time.  
 You possess a heart ... You treasure love.

We have to be careful that the things we own don't own us. We can get caught up in the desire for more and more, despite what we already have. An insatiable drive to be successful without ever experiencing contentment can creep in. Our yearnings for more possessions and wealth can go unchecked. Our possessions can way us down and keep us shackled.

Jesus asks us each to take the heart test and to then do something with the results. He wants us to align our heart with what God wants. This will change everything in our lives: your priorities, your motives, your actions, your ambitions, your security, your self-esteem, your self-worth, how you carry yourself, and your relationships.

How do you align your heart up with what God wants? How do you store your treasures up in heaven?

One of the most specific lists is found in 1 Timothy 6:17-19. Turn there with me as you keep your finger on Matthew 6.

READ 1 Timothy 6:17-19

To lay our treasure up in heaven, we are told to:

1. Be humble (don't be arrogant)
2. Depend on God
3. Do good deeds
4. Be generous

God reminds us that by being humble, depending on God, doing good deeds, and being generous, we can take hold of the life that is truly life! Jesus wants us to choose love over hate, kindness over harshness, empathy over insensitivity, truth-telling over lying, forgiveness over grudge-bearing, a polite spirit over rudeness, silence over slander, wisdom over foolishness, purity over immorality, faith over unbelief, or generosity over stinginess. When we delight the heart of God, we add to our heavenly portfolio.

This is what Jesus is getting at: He wants each of us to focus on heavenly riches, not worldly possessions.

One of the ways you can tell if your heart is aligned with God's heart is by asking yourself this question, "Who am I taking to heaven with me?"

When you get to heaven, what a joy it will be to see all of those with whom you shared the gospel. It might be your children, your friends, your neighbors, other relatives, even the lady who waited on your table at Judy's or the fellow behind the counter at Cerro Gordo Foods.

Won't it be a grand time to hear: "I'm here because you shared your love of Christ with me"?

1 Peter 1:4 calls this kind of deposit "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you..."

The heart test might be calling some of you to switch your focus from your own desires. The heart test that Jesus gives might be calling you to begin right now sharing your faith. The heart test is calling you to align your life with God's priorities.

A heart that is aligned with God's priorities:

Can't be eaten by moths,  
Can't be destroyed by rust,  
And can't be stolen by thieves!

Jesus not only gives us the heart test, but he also gives us:

### **TEST # 2: THE EYE TEST – Matthew 6:22-23**

This section almost seems out of joint until you understand what the eye means and what Jesus is saying about it.

Someone once said that the eye is the window to the soul. Here, Jesus is saying that the eye is the lamp for the soul. It is the source of light in our lives. Jesus wants us each to realize that what we focus our eyes on determines how bright or dark our souls are.

The test that Jesus gives here is the eye exam. It is not the one you have to take to get your driver's license, nor the one you have to take to determine if you need glasses. This eye exam is about what you focus on.

When Jesus gives us this eye exam, He is looking for the condition of our souls. Our inner beings can be darkened by focusing our eyes on the wrong things.

We are not to be focusing on money, popularity, power, wealth, etc. This is greed. If you are busily focusing on more, then your soul will be darkened.

The fact is that the darkness of your soul can be hidden from others, but not from God. We need this eye exam, because we need the light that Christ offers.

A movie recently came out on DVD called the *Aviator*. It is about a man who was able to hide the darkness of his soul from everyone. In fact, the movie makes this man out to be a hero!

An article Leadership Journal, described the man of this movie this way:

All he ever really wanted in life was more. He wanted more money, so he parlayed inherited wealth into a billion-dollar pile of assets. He wanted more fame, so he broke into the Hollywood scene and soon became a filmmaker and star. He wanted more sensual pleasures, so he paid handsome sums to indulge his every sexual urge. He wanted more thrills, so he designed, built, and piloted the fastest aircraft in the world. He wanted more power, so he secretly dealt political favors so skillfully that two US presidents became his pawns. All he ever wanted was more. He was absolutely convinced that more would bring him true satisfaction. Unfortunately, even if the movie make him out as a hero, history shows otherwise. He concluded his life emaciated; colorless; sunken chest; fingernails in grotesque, inches-long corkscrews; rotting, black teeth; tumors; innumerable needle marks from his drug addiction. Howard Hughes died believing the myth of more. He died a billionaire junkie, insane by all reasonable standards. Howard Hughes had his eyes on more of the world, rather than more of God.

The eye exam that Jesus gives makes us each realize that what we need is a clear focus. We each need a clear vision of Jesus Christ as our Lord.

*Hebrews 12:2 - Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Jesus has given us the:

The heart test

The eye exam, and then He gives us:

**TEST #3: THE GRIP TEST** – Matthew 6:24

Jesus is not giving us advice. He is not saying, "You should not serve both God and money."

Jesus is not giving us a choice about it. He is not saying, "You must not serve both God and money."

No, instead Jesus lays out an impossibility, "You cannot serve both God and money."

In other words, we have no choice; we each serve one, and only one, master. We are either a servant to God, or a slave to our possessions.

It is easy for us to make money our master. This is what the world treasures. This is what America treasures!

Jesus reminds us that when we make money our master, God is not being served.

Someone once said, "Money is a wonderful servant, but a lousy master." So who is your master?

In their book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, authors James Patterson and Peter Kim reveal some shocking statistics on how far people in this country are willing to go for money. People shared that for \$2 million:

- (25%) Would abandon their entire family
- (23%) Would become prostitutes for a week or more
- (16%) Would give up their American citizenship
- (16%) Would leave their spouses
- (10%) Would withhold testimony and let a murderer go free
- (7%) Would kill a stranger
- (3%) Would put their children up for adoption

The grip test gives us an opportunity to look at what each of us really care about. We have to ask ourselves: What do you have a grip on and won't let go?

Jesus once told a parable about a man who had a grip on wealth. Jesus called him the rich fool.

This man did not seem foolish at first. In fact, he was a good farmer and a shrewd businessman. Jesus tells us that his land produced an abundant amount of crops. With wealth pouring in much faster than he could use it, he faced a problem. "What should I do," he thought to himself, "for I have no place to store my crops?" (Luke 12:17).

The solution is this: he decides to pull down his barns and build bigger ones, so that he can store all his grain and his goods. He was quick to get a grip on the problem. He was quick to get a grip on his wealth.

Then comes a big surprise: death! Something the rich man didn't factor into his business plan or enter into his Excel spreadsheet. God says to him, "You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?" (12:20).

For the first time in his life, this rich man is speechless. He realizes that his status as a wealthy man doesn't help him at all. In fact, it puts his soul in danger. He discovers that he has had his grip on his possessions. He focused too much on the things he had, but he didn't have a grip on his own soul.

The big bucks that always felt like a blessing now cut like a curse.

Jesus' advice is strong and to the point: "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions" (12:15).

Jesus wants us each to look at what we have a grip on. Do we have a grip on our finances, our family, or other priorities? OR do we have a grip on what really matters?

We each need to hold closely the things of God! We each need to get a grip on the things that God wants us to.

Jesus commands us to hold tightly to the things of God and loosely to the things of the world.

Jesus gave us the heart test and asks "What do you treasure?"

Jesus gave us the eye exam and asks, "What are you focusing on?"

Jesus gave us the grip test and asks, "Who are you serving?"

Each of these tell us to keep our eyes on the ball. Each of these tests tell us to focus on what God wants, rather than success.

According to our standards of success, Jesus was one of the failures of history. He disappointed His friends and followers. His family considered Him a hopeless dreamer. He was trained for a respectable trade but turned His back upon it. He never drew a salary, never saved any money, never even owned a house in which to live. He achieved none of the status symbols that we consider so important – a flashy new car, two television sets, an honorary degree, and so on. The only status symbol He achieved was a cross on which He suffered a lonely death. What a tragedy for such a fine young Man to come to such a dreary end! Today we call Him 'Lord,' but many of us do not really want the kind of success that He achieved. (Charles Allen, The Sermon on the Mount)

Jesus is asking you to take each test and evaluate where you stand with Him. Have you been busy chasing after the American dream or after what Christ wants? Will there be treasure in heaven or are you more focused on passing on a large inheritance?

Do you know why Jesus gave up being "successful"? For you. **DECISION TIME.**