

[text of the 1872 ed.]

UPON OUR LORD'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Discourse 8

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal; For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Matt. 6:19-23.

1. From those which are commonly termed religious actions, and which are real branches of true religion where they spring from a pure and holy intention and are performed in a manner suitable thereto, -- our Lord proceeds to the actions of common life, and shows that the same purity of intention is as indispensably required in our ordinary business as in giving alms, or fasting, or prayer.

And without question the same purity of intention "which makes our alms and devotions acceptable must also make our labour or employment a proper offering to God. If a man pursues his business that he may raise himself to a state of honour and riches in the world, he is no longer serving God in his employment, and has no more title to a reward from God than he who gives alms that he may be seen, or prays that he may be heard of men. For vain and earthly designs are no more allowable in our employments than in our alms and devotions. They are not only evil when they mix with our good works," with our religious actions, "but they have the same evil nature when they enter into the common business of our employments. If it were allowable to pursue them in our worldly employments, it would be allowable to pursue them in our devotions. But as our alms and devotions are not an acceptable service but when they proceed from a pure intention, so our common employment cannot be reckoned a service to him but when it is performed with the same piety of heart."

2. This our blessed Lord declares in the liveliest manner in those strong and comprehensive words which he explains, enforces, and enlarges upon, throughout this whole chapter. "The light of the body is the eye: If therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." The eye is the intention: what the eye is to the body, the intention is to the soul. As the one guides all the motions of the body, so does the other those of the soul. This eye of the soul is then said to be single when it looks at one thing only; when we have no other design but to "know God, and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent," -- to know him with suitable affections, loving him as he hath loved us; to please God in all things; to serve God (as we love him) with all our heart and mind and Soul and strength; and to enjoy God in all and above all things, in time and in eternity.

3. "If thine eye be" thus "single," thus fixed on God, "thy whole body shall be full of light." "Thy whole body:" -- all that is guided by the intention, as the body is by the eye. All thou art, all thou doest thy desires, tempers, affections; thy thoughts, and words, and actions. The whole of these "shall be full of light;" full of true divine knowledge. This is the first thing we may here understand by light. "In his light thou shalt see light." "He which of old commanded light to shine out of darkness, shall shine in thy heart:" He shall enlighten the eyes of thy understanding with the knowledge of the glory of God. His Spirit shall reveal unto thee the deep things of God. The inspiration of the Holy One shall give thee understanding, and cause thee to know wisdom secretly. Yea, the anointing which thou receivest of him "shall abide in thee and teach thee of all things."

How does experience confirm this! Even after God hath opened the eyes of our understanding, if we seek or desire anything else than God, how soon is our foolish heart darkened! Then clouds again rest upon our souls. Doubts and fears again overwhelm us. We are tossed to and fro, and know not what to do, or which is the path wherein we should go. But when we desire and seek nothing but God, clouds and doubts vanish away. We who "were sometime darkness are now light in the Lord." The night now shineth as the day and we find "the path of the upright is light." God showeth us the path wherein we should go, and maketh plain the way before our face.

4. The Second thing which we may here understand by light, is holiness. While thou seekest God in all things thou shalt find him in all, the fountain of all holiness, continually filling thee with his own likeness, with justice, mercy, and truth. While thou lookest unto Jesus and Him alone thou shalt be filled with the mind that was in him. Thy soul shall be renewed day by day after the image of him that created it. If the eye of thy mind be not removed from him, if thou endurest "as seeing him that is invisible," and seeking nothing else in heaven or earth, then as thou beholdest the glory of the Lord thou shalt be transformed "into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord."

And it is also matter of daily experience that "by grace we are" thus "saved through faith." It is by faith that the eye of the mind is opened to see the light of the glorious love of God. And as long as it is steadily fixed thereon, on God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, we are more and more filled with the love of God and man, with meekness, gentleness, long-suffering; with all the fruits of holiness, which are, through Christ Jesus, to the glory of God the Father.

5. This light which fills him who has a single eye implies, Thirdly, happiness as well as holiness. Surely "light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is to see the sun:" But how much more to see the Sun of Righteousness continually shining upon the soul! And if there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any peace that passeth all understanding, if any rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, they all belong to him whose eye is single. Thus is his "whole body full of light." He walketh in the light as God is in the light, rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks, enjoying whatever is the will of God concerning him in Christ Jesus.

6. "But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness." "If thine eye be evil:" -- We see there is no medium between a single and an evil eye. If the eye be not single, then it is evil. If the intention in whatever we do be not singly to God, if we seek anything else, then our "mind and conscience are defiled."

Our eye therefore is evil if in anything we do we aim at any other end than God; if we have any view, but to know and to love God, to please and serve him in all things; if we have any other design than to enjoy God, to be happy in him both now and for ever.

7. If thine eye be not singly fixed on God, "thy whole body shall be full of darkness." The veil shall still remain on thy heart. Thy mind shall be more and more blinded by "the God of this world," "lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine upon thee." Thou wilt be full of ignorance and error touching the things of God, not being able to receive or discern them. And even when thou hast some desire to serve God, thou wilt be full of uncertainty as to the manner of serving him; finding doubts and difficulties on every side, and not seeing any way to escape.

Yea, if thine eye be not single, if thou seek any of the things of earth, thou shalt be full of ungodliness and unrighteousness, thy desires, tempers, affections, being all out of course, being all dark, and vile, and vain. And thy conversation will be evil as well as thy heart, not "seasoned with salt," or "meet to minister grace unto the hearers;" but idle, unprofitable, corrupt, grievous to the Holy Spirit of God.

8. Both destruction and unhappiness are in thy ways; "for the way of peace hast thou not known." There is no peace, no settled, solid peace, for them that know not God. There is no true nor lasting content for any who do not seek him with their whole heart. While thou aimest at any of the things that perish, "all that cometh is vanity;" yea, not only vanity, but "vexation of spirit," and that both in the pursuit and the enjoyment also. Thou walkest indeed in a vain shadow, and disquietest thyself in vain. Thou walkest in darkness that may be felt. Sleep on; but thou canst not take thy rest. The dreams of life can give pain, and that thou knowest; but ease they cannot give. There is no rest in this world or the world to come, but only in God, the centre of spirits.

"If the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" If the intention which ought to enlighten the whole soul, to fill it with knowledge, and love, and peace, and which in fact does so as long as it is single, as long as it aims at God alone -- if this be darkness; if it aim at anything beside God, and consequently cover the soul with darkness instead of light, with ignorance and error, with sin and misery: O how great is that darkness! It is the very smoke which ascends out of the bottomless pit! It is the essential night which reigns in the lowest deep, in the land of the shadow of death!

9. Therefore, "lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal." If you do, it is plain your eye is evil; it is not singly fixed on God.

With regard to most of the commandments of God, whether relating to the heart or life, the Heathens of Africa or America stand much on a level with those that are called Christians. The Christians observe them (a few only being excepted) very near as much as the Heathens. For instance: the generality of the natives of England, commonly called Christians, are as sober and as temperate as the generality of the heathens near the Cape of Good Hope. And so the Dutch or French Christians are as humble and as chaste as the Choctaw or Cherokee Indians. It is not easy to say, when we compare the bulk of the nations in Europe with those in America, whether the superiority lies on the one side or the other. At least the American has not much the advantage. But we cannot affirm this with regard to the command now before us. Here the heathen has far the pre-eminence. He desires and seeks nothing more than plain food to eat and plain raiment to put on. And he seeks this only from day to day. He reserves, he lays up nothing; unless it be as much corn at one season of the year as he will need before that season returns. This command, therefore, the heathens, though they know it not, do constantly and punctually observe. They "lay up for themselves no treasures upon earth;" no stores of purple or fine linen, of gold or silver, which either "moth or rust may corrupt", or "thieves break through and steal." But how do the Christians observe what they profess to receive as a command of the most high God? Not at all! not in any degree; no more than if no such command had ever been given to man. Even the good Christians, as they are accounted by others as well as themselves, pay no manner of regard thereto. It might as well be still hid in its original Greek for any notice they take of it. In what Christian city do you find one man of five hundred who makes the least scruple of laying up just as much treasure as he can? -- of increasing his goods just as far as he is able? There are indeed those who would not do this unjustly; there are many who will neither rob nor steal; and some who will not defraud their neighbour; nay, who will not gain either by his ignorance or necessity. But this is quite another point. Even these do not scruple the thing, but the manner of it. They do not scruple the "laying up treasures upon earth," but the laying them up by dishonesty. They do not start at disobeying Christ, but at a breach of heathen morality. So that even these honest men do no more obey this command than a highwayman or a house-breaker. Nay, they never designed to obey it. From their youth up it never entered into their thoughts. They were bred up by their Christian parents, masters, and friends, without any instruction at all concerning it; unless it were this, -- to break it as soon and as much as they could, and to continue breaking it to their lives' end.

10. There is no one instance of spiritual infatuation in the world which is more amazing than this. Most of these very men read or hear the Bible read, -- many of them every Lord's day. They have read or heard these words an hundred times, and yet never suspect that they are themselves condemned thereby, any more than by those which forbid parents to offer up their sons or daughters unto Moloch. O that God would speak to these miserable self-deceivers with his own voice, his mighty voice! That they may at last awake out of the snare of the devil, and the scales may fall from their eyes!

Do you ask what it is to "lay up treasures on earth?" It will be needful to examine this thoroughly. And first, observe what is not forbidden in this command, that we may clearly discern what is

We are not forbidden in this command, First, to "provide things honest in the sight of all men," to provide wherewith we may render unto all their due, -- whatsoever they can justly demand of us. So far from it that we are taught of God to "owe no man anything." We ought therefore to use all diligence in our calling, in order to owe no man anything: this being no other than a plain law of common justice which our Lord came "not to destroy but to fulfil."

Neither, Secondly, does he here forbid the providing for ourselves such things as are needful for the body; a sufficiency of plain, wholesome food to eat, and clean raiment to put on. Yea, it is our duty, so far as God puts it into our power, to provide these things also; to the end we may "eat our own bread," and be burdensome to no man.

Nor yet are we forbidden, Thirdly, to provide for our children, and for those of our own household. This also it is our duty to do, even upon principles of heathen morality. Every man ought to provide the plain necessities of life both for his own wife and children, and to put them into a capacity of providing these for themselves when he is gone hence and is no more seen. I say, of providing *these*, the plain necessities of life; not delicacies, not superfluities; -- and that by their diligent labour; for it is no man's duty to furnish them any more than himself with the means either Of luxury or idleness. But if any man provides not thus far for his own children (as well as for the widows of his own house, of whom primarily St. Paul is speaking in those well-known words to Timothy), he hath practically "denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel," or Heathen.

Lastly. We are not forbidden, in these words, to lay up, from time to time what is needful for the carrying on our worldly business in such a measure and degree as is sufficient to answer the foregoing purposes; -- in such a measure as, First, to owe no man anything; Secondly, to procure for ourselves the necessities of life; and, Thirdly, to furnish those of our own house with them while we live, and with the means of procuring them when we are gone to God.

12. We may now clearly discern (unless we are unwilling to discern it) what that is which is forbidden here. It is the designedly procuring more of this world's goods than will answer the foregoing purposes; the labouring after a larger measure of worldly substance, a larger increase of gold and silver, -- the laying up any more than these ends require, -- is what is here expressly and absolutely forbidden. If the words have any meaning at all, it must be this; for they are capable of no other. Consequently, whoever he is that, owing no man anything, and having food and raiment for himself and his household, together with a sufficiency to carry on his worldly business so far as answers these reasonable purposes; whosoever, I say, being already in these circumstances, seeks a still larger portion on earth; he lives in an open habitual denial of the Lord that bought him. He hath practically denied the faith, and is worse than" an African or American "infidel."

13. Hear ye this, all ye that dwell in the world, and love the world wherein ye dwell. Ye may be "highly esteemed of men," but ye are "an abomination in the sight of God." How long shall your souls cleave to the dust? How long will ye load yourselves with thick clay? When will ye awake and see that the open, speculative Heathens are nearer the kingdom of heaven than you? When will ye be persuaded to choose the better part; that which cannot be taken away from you? When will ye seek only to "lay up treasures in heaven," renouncing, dreading, abhorring all other? If you aim at "laying up treasures on earth," you are not merely losing your time and spending your strength for that which is not bread: for what is the fruit if you succeed? -- You have murdered your own soul! You have extinguished the last spark of spiritual life therein! Now indeed, in the midst of life you are in death! You are a living man, but a dead Christian. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Your heart is sunk into the dust, your soul cleaveth to the ground. Your affections are set, not on things above, but on things of the earth; on poor husks that may poison, but cannot satisfy an everlasting spirit made for God. Your love your joy, your desire are all placed on the things which perish in the using. You have thrown away the treasure in heaven: God and Christ are lost! You have gained riches, and hell-fire!

14. O "how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" When our Lord's disciples were astonished at his speaking thus he was so far from retracting it that he repeated the same important truth in stronger terms than before. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." How hard is it for them whose very word is applauded not to be true in their own eyes! How hard for them not to think themselves better than the poor, base, uneducated herd of men! How hard not to seek happiness in their riches, or in things dependent upon them; in gratifying the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, or the pride of life! O ye rich, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Only, with all God all things are possible!

15. And even if you do not succeed, what is the fruit of your endeavouring to lay up treasures on earth? "They that will be rich" (_hoi boulomenoi ploutein_ ~~~~, they that *desire*, that *endeavour* after it, whether they succeed or no,) "fall into a temptation and a snare," -- a gin, a trap of the devil; "and into many foolish and hurtful lusts;" -- _epithymias anoEtous_, *desires* with which *reason hath nothing to do*; such as properly belong, not to rational and immortal beings, but only to the brute beasts which have no understanding; -- "which drown men in destruction and perdition," in present and eternal misery. Let us but open our eyes, and we may daily see the melancholy proofs of this, -- men who, desiring, resolving to be rich, coveting after money, the root of all evil, have already pierced themselves through with many sorrows, and anticipated the hell to which they are going!

The cautiousness with which the Apostle here speaks is highly observable. He does not affirm this absolutely of the rich: For a man may possibly be rich, without any fault of his, by an overruling Providence, preventing his own choice: But he affirms it of _hoi boulomenoi plourein_, *those who desire* or seek to be rich. Riches, dangerous as they are, do not always "drown men in destruction and perdition;" but the *desire of riches* does: those who calmly desire and deliberately seek to attain them, whether they do, in fact, gain the world or no, do infallibly lose their own souls. These are they that sell him who bought them with his blood, for a few pieces of gold or silver. These enter into a covenant with death and hell; and their covenant shall stand. For they are daily making themselves meet to partake of their inheritance with the devil and his angels!

16. O who shall warn this generation of vipers to flee from the wrath to come! Not those who lie at their gate, or cringe at their feet, desiring to be fed with the crumbs that fall from their tables. Not those who court their favour or fear their frown: none of those who mind earthly things. But if there be a Christian upon earth, if there be a man who hath overcome the world, who desires nothing but God, and fears none but him that is able to destroy both body and soul in hell; thou, O man of God, speak and spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet! Cry aloud, and show these honourable sinners the desperate condition wherein they stand! It may be, one in a thousand may have ears to hear, may arise and shake himself from the dust; may break loose from these chains that bind him to the earth, and at length lay up treasures in heaven.

17. And if it should be that one of these, by the mighty power of God, awoke and asked, "What must I do to be saved?" the answer, according to the oracles of God, is clear, full, and express. God doth not say to thee, "Sell all that thou hast." Indeed he who seeth the hearts of men saw it needful to enjoin this in one peculiar case, that of the young, rich ruler. But he never laid it down for a general rule to all rich men, in all succeeding generations. His general direction is, first, "Be not high minded." God seeth not as man seeth." He esteems thee not for thy riches, grandeur or equipage, for any qualification or accomplishment which is directly or indirectly owing to thy wealth, which can be bought or procured thereby. All these are with him as dung and dross: let them be so with thee also. Beware thou think not thyself to be one jot wiser or better for all these things. Weigh thyself in another balance: estimate thyself only by the measure of faith and love which God hath given thee. If thou hast more of the knowledge and love of God than he, thou art on this account, and no other, wiser and better, more valuable and honourable than him who is with the dogs of thy flock. But if thou hast not this treasure those art more foolish, more vile, more truly contemptible, I will not say, than the lowest servant under thy roof, but than the beggar laid at thy gate, full of sores.

18. Secondly. "Trust not in uncertain riches." Trust not in them for help: And trust not in them for happiness.

First. Trust not in them for help. Thou art miserably mistaken if thou lookest for this in gold or silver. These are no more able to set thee *above the world* than to set thee above the devil. Know that both the world, and the prince of this world, laugh at all such preparations against them. These will little avail in the day of trouble-even if they remain in the trying hour. But it is not certain that they will; for how oft do they "make themselves wings and fly away!" But if not, what support will they afford, even in the ordinary troubles of life? The desire of thy eyes, the wife of thy youth, thy son, thine only son, or the friend which was as thy own soul, is taken away at a stroke. Will thy riches re-animate the breathless clay, or call back its late inhabitant? Will they secure thee from sickness, diseases, pain? Do these visit the poor only? Nay, he that feeds thy flocks or tills thy ground has less sickness and pain than thou. He is more rarely visited by these unwelcome guests: and if they come there at all they are more easily driven away from the little cot than from the "cloud-topt palaces." And during the time that thy body is chastened with pain, or consumes away with pining sickness, how do thy treasures help thee? Let the poor Heathen answer, --

_Ut lippum pictae tabulae, fomenta podagram,
Auriculas citharae collecta sorde dolentes._

[Such help as pictures to sore eyes afford,
As heap'd-up tables to their gouty lord.]

19. But there is at hand a greater trouble than all these. Thou art to die! Thou art to sink into dust; to return to the ground from which thou wast taken, to mix with common clay. Thy body is to go to the earth as it was, while thy spirit returns to God that gave it. And the time draws on: the years slide away with a swift though silent pace. Perhaps your day is far spent: the noon of life is past, and the evening shadows begin to rest upon you. You feel in yourself sure approaching decay. The springs of life wear away apace. Now what help is there in your riches? Do they sweeten death? Do they endear that solemn hour? Quite the reverse. "O death, how bitter art thou to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions!" How unacceptable to him is that awful sentence, "This night shall thy soul be required of thee!" -- Or will they prevent the unwelcome stroke, or protract the dreadful hour? Can they deliver your soul that it should not see death? Can they restore the years that are past? Can they add to your appointed time a month, a day, an hour, a moment? -- Or will the good things you have chosen for your portion here follow you over the great gulf? Not so. Naked came you into this world; naked must you return.

_Linguenda tellus, et domus, et placens
Uxor; neque harum quas colis, arborum,
Te, praeter invisam cupressos,

Ulla brevem dominum sequetur!_

[The following is Boscawen's translation of these verses from Horace:

Thy lands, thy dome, thy pleasing wife,
These must thou quit; 'tis nature's doom.
No tree, whose culture charms thy life,
Save the sad cypress, waits thy tomb. -- Edit.]

Surely, were not these truths too plain to be observed, because they are too plain to be denied, no man that is to die could possibly trust for help in uncertain riches.

To my new courts sad thought does still repair,
And round my gilded roofs hangs hovering care?

Indeed experience is here so full, strong, and undeniable, that it makes all other arguments needless. Appeal we therefore to fact. Are the rich and great the only happy

Amidst our plenty something still,-
To me, to thee, to him is wanting!
That cruel something unpossessed
Corrodes and leavens all the rest.

Yea, and so it will, till thy wearisome days of vanity are shut up in the night of death.

Surely then, to trust in riches for happiness is the greatest folly of all that are under the sun! Are you not convinced of this? Is it possible you should still expect t

21. These are all dead show. Regard them not. Trust thou in the living God; so shalt thou be safe under the shadow of the Almighty; his faithfulness and truth shall be th

0 trust in Him for happiness as well as for help. All the springs of happiness are in him. Trust in him "who giveth us all things richly to enjoy," _parechonti plousiOs p

22. Thirdly, seek not to increase in goods. "Lay not up for" thyself "treasures upon earth." This is a flat, positive command; full as clear as "Thou shalt not commit adu

23. If you ask, "But what must we do with our goods, seeing we have more than we have occasion to use, if we must not lay them up? Must we throw them away?" I answer: If

How pernicious to your own soul the latter of these is has been excellently shown by a late writer: --

"If we waste our money we are not only guilty of wasting a talent which God has given us, but we do ourselves this farther harm, we turn this useful talent into a powerfu

"As wit and fine parts cannot be only trifled away, but will expose those that have them to greater follies, so money cannot be only trifled away, but if it is not used a

"In using riches where they have no real use, nor we any real want, we only use them to our great hurt, in creating unreasonable desires, in nourishing ill tempers, in in

"So that money thus spent is not merely wasted or lost, but it is spent to bad purposes and miserable effects; to the corruption and disorder of our hearts; to the making

24. Equally inexcusable are those who lay up what they do not need for any reasonable purposes: --

"If a man had hands and eyes and feet that he could give to those that wanted them; if he should lock them up in a chest instead of giving them to his brethren that were

"Now money has very much the nature of eyes and feet. If therefore we lock it up in chests, while the poor and distressed want it for their necessary uses, we are not far

25. May not this be another reason why rich men shall so hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven? A vast majority of them are under a curse, under the peculiar curse of G

26. The true way of employing what you do not want yourselves you may, Fourthly, learn from those words of our Lord which are the counterpart of what went before: "Lay up

Give to the poor with a single eye, with an upright heart, and write, "So much given to God." For "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye ha

This is the part of a "faithful and wise steward:" Not to sell either his houses or lands, or principal stock, be it more or less, unless some peculiar circumstance shoul

27. We "charge" you, therefore, "who are rich in this world," as having authority from our great Lord and Master, _agathoergein_~, -- to be *habitually doing good*, to liv

28. We exhort you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to be "willing to communicate;" _koinOnikous einai_~: to be of the same spirit (though not in the same outward sta

No fair occasion pass unheeded by;
Snatching the golden moments as they fly,
Thou by few fleeting years ensure eternity!

"By patient continuance in well-doing, seek" thou "for glory and honour and immortality." In a constant, zealous performance of all good works, wait thou for that happy h

[Edited by Jean Fogerson, student at Northwest Nazarene College (Nampa, ID), with corrections by George Lyons for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology.]

This document (last modified September 30, 1995) from the