

Ken Arthur  
February 16, 2025

## Where is Our Treasure?

1 Timothy 6:6-10;17-19

Matthew 6:19-24

“In 1963, the wealthiest families had 36 times the wealth of families in the middle of the wealth distribution. By 2022, they had 71 times the wealth of families in the middle.”<sup>1</sup>

I’m pretty well convinced that much of our nation’s and world’s problems today are a direct result of unabashed greed. This shouldn’t come as any big surprise.

Jesus warned us in the sermon on the mount: “where your treasure is, there will your heart be. ... No one can serve two superiors. ... You cannot give yourself to God and Money.”

We all live out of a set of values. We can align our values with God, with love, hope, peace, and justice. Or we can align our values with what the world tells us is success: the accumulation of wealth and power at any cost. But Jesus tells us it isn’t possible to do both.

In a 2013 Ted Talk, researcher Paul Piff presented the results of scientific studies that looked at the effects of wealth on values.<sup>2</sup> What they found is that as wealth increases, entitlement and self-interest also increase while compassion and empathy decrease.

Now, of course, we all exhibit self-interested behaviors at times. But the richer we are, the more likely we are to care less about the plight of others.

Their studies found that the richer one is, the more likely they are to cheat to win a prize, to lie in negotiations, and to justify unethical behavior. The more expensive car one owns, the more likely one is to break driving laws.

Again, it should probably be no surprise that we are seeing greedy billionaires stage a coup on the government, firing the employees and closing the agencies whose job it is to watch for and report on corruption. All the while ironically claiming those government entities are themselves corrupt without providing any evidence.

Yet, while the American Dream tells us we can all become rich and have anything we want, economic inequality, which is bad now and shows all the signs of getting much, much worse, actually makes that American Dream less and less possible.

Studies show that economic inequality correlates with across the board decreases in social mobility, economic growth, community life, social trust, life expectancy, educational performance, and physical health.

At the same time, it also correlates with across the board increases in obesity, abuse of drugs, teenage births, rates of violence, rates of imprisonment, and incidence of punishment.

Jesus knew what he was talking about when a person approached him and asked what they must do to obtain unity with God.<sup>3</sup> Jesus advised them to follow all of the commandments, leading a life of virtue, always treating others with respect, fairness, and compassion.

When the person assured Jesus that they already did those things and yet their life was still lacking, Jesus looked upon them with love and said, “You’re only missing one thing. Go

---

1 <https://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/>

2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJ8Kq1wucsk>

---

3 Mark 10:17-25, Matthew 19:16-24, Luke 18:18-25

and sell everything you have, all of your land and all of your possessions. Give the proceeds to the poor and then come and follow me as one of my disciples.” When they heard this, they went away crestfallen for they were very wealthy.

Then Jesus said to the disciples, “It is very difficult for the wealthy to walk God’s Way of Love. It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”

Jesus knew the dangers of wealth, as did the author of the letter to Timothy, who warns us in even stronger language than Jesus: “Those who want to be rich are falling into temptation and a trap. They are letting themselves be captured by foolish and harmful desires which draw us down to ruin and destruction. The love of money is the root of all evil. Some people, in their passion for it, have strayed from the faith and have come to grief amid great pain.”

We cannot serve wealth and money and it’s evil cousin power if we desire to serve God. So the question we need to ask ourselves in this age of billionaires running wild: where is our treasure? Where is our heart? Where do we want it to be?

Money can give us comfort, pleasure, and maybe the illusion of security and power. But I don’t believe it leads to meaning, to a fulfilling life abundant in what God tells us is important: love for each other and justice for all of God’s creation.

What money leads to is the desire for more money. The more we get, the more we want and the less we care about how we get it.

So where is our treasure? Where is our heart? Is it in our stocks and bank accounts? Or are we more heavily invested in each other? In love and kindness and compassion? We can’t serve both money and God, so which will we serve?

Do we want to live and serve the 1%, the ultra-rich, so they can prosper and flourish, at least until it all comes crashing down in ruin and destruction as the letter to Timothy warns? All in the vain and unlikely hope that we will be one of them one day.

Or do we want to live and serve God so everyone can prosper and flourish, now and forever?

There are forces pulling us in all directions, but ultimately we get to choose which path we walk. We get to choose the attitude we adopt toward God, life, our neighbors, and Creation.

I think this is what Jesus gets at when he talks about the lamp of the eye. How we see and understand the world affects our whole body, our whole life.

If our understanding is diseased, self-centered and without compassion and empathy, then we will live in darkness. When we come to life with a scarcity mentality, thinking I have to get mine because there’s not enough for everyone, then we’ll fall to those temptations and traps of wealth.

We’ll find ourselves doing anything to get it. The truth of this is lived out in front of us as we increasingly abuse each other and nature in the pursuit of quarterly profits.

But, if our understanding is sound, based in God and love of our neighbor, then life will be filled with light.

When we come to life with an abundance mentality, generous and compassionate, knowing there is actually enough for everyone’s needs to be met, then we lift everyone up. Everyone has the chance to lead a fulfilling and spiritually abundant life. To become who God created them to be.

Jesus and the letter to Timothy also both warn us that wealth is temporary and unstable – it can be lost or stolen and we

certainly can't take it with us when our time here on this earth is complete.

But no one can take God's love from us. It simply isn't possible. Our outlook, our attitude, our commitment to love – we can give those things away, but none of them can be taken from us.

Famed psychologist Viktor Frankl pointed out that when people in Nazi concentration camps were stripped of everything, their dignity, their possessions, everything – the one thing that couldn't be taken away was their attitude.

Everyone had to choose how they were going to suffer and find meaning in that choice. Those who clung to hope and a belief in goodness survived longer. Those prisoners that lost hope died not long afterward.

We can choose our path in this life. We can choose our attitude. We can choose where our heart is, where we put our treasure. I invite us all to spend some time in the near future reflecting on where our treasure is. What is our relationship to money and God?

Do we think of ourselves as stingy or generous?

Do we give to God? Not only money but time and talents, which we also monetize in this modern world?

Do we give to causes that we believe in? Organizations that are fighting for justice?

Or do we hoard our money, always worried about not having enough and how we can get more?

And how do we contribute to a capitalism that wreaks havoc on the environment?

Do we shop at places that pay low wages without benefits so we can save a few dollars?

Do we pay attention to where our retirement funds are invested? Are those good investments for the future of humanity?

Do we go for quick profits in guns and oil? Or do we look for companies that care about diversity, equity, inclusion, and the lives of their employees and customers?

Believe me, I'm preaching to myself here too. I know I personally need to do a lot more thinking about this. Some things I think I do pretty well with, but I'm sure I need to make more changes in my relationship to money.

Where our treasure is, is where our heart is.

The letter to Timothy asks us to be content. If we have food, clothing, and shelter, that is all we truly need to be happy. Anything else is gravy, a blessing for which we should be exceedingly grateful. And it's meant to be shared.

The letter further advises that those who find themselves with wealth, however it was obtained, whether through inheritance or hard work or just dumb luck, should remember that that wealth doesn't make them any better than anyone else.

Wealth in our culture might come with privilege, but in God's eyes wealth does not bring privilege but responsibility. The letter to Timothy advises those with wealth that they are to do good for those around them.

The more wealth we have, the more goodness we should be bringing to the world. And to their credit, there are wealthy people who do a lot of good in the world, but they are the exception that proves what the world could be and not what it is.

I hope we can all take that question – where is our treasure? – with us and reflect on it, study it, maybe let it change our lives that we might see the world through the lens of God’s love and not through the lens of greed and selfishness.

That we might remember those in need, who live in poverty, those who are marginalized. That we might give our gifts, whether the gifts of finance or our lives, to God in love so this world might yet become God’s kin-dom of hope, peace, and justice.

Amen.