

POSSESSION OBSESSION

Matthew 6:19-24

INTRODUCTION:

How do you measure success? The dictionary defines success as: “the satisfactory completion of something.” But does that not demand the follow-up question: the satisfactory completion of what? Success is the satisfactory completion of that into which you invest yourself.

The dictionary also defines success as “to attain a desired object or end.” But what object? What end? Is it not whatever object or end a person values most highly?

- A criminal who is good at what he does and who does not get caught might have achieved his goal but most of us would not consider him a success.
- An entrepreneur who accumulates great wealth by deceitful means may have attained his desired goal but I trust you would not consider him a success.
- A person who sets out to cheat the system and get government benefits to which he is not entitled might very well have accomplished what he set out to accomplish but I hope you would not identify him as a success.

You see, the goal matters; the object is important; the target makes a difference. In fact, I would suggest to you that the most critical and fundamental question you will ever answer is, “What is my goal?” “What is the end toward which I am working?” “What do I wish to accomplish?” The satisfactory completion of an unworthy goal does not make a person a success.

Jeno Paulucci, the founder of Chun King and Jeno’s Pizza was interviewed by Marilyn Machlowitz during the research for her book, *Workaholics: Living With Them, Working With Them*. Paulucci told Machlowitz,

“My goal has always been to make money ethically and honestly; not only to make money for the currency value but as a measure of success – just like someone playing golf, his scorecard is his measure of success in that game. In my game, it is making money.”

Paulucci, like so many others, is unable to stop working, even when on vacation. He wrote to Machlowitz,

“I am now dictating this from Acapulco. I don’t even leave the phone. I am pacing around this pool wondering what I should do next. I am writing memos, calling the office, calling New York, calling Chicago. I just can’t relax.”

How do you measure success? Is your self-worth measured by your net-worth?

There is a better way to live. There is a higher standard by which you can measure: a nobler standard, a more accurate standard. Listen to God's standard of success found in Matthew 6:19-24.

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

You see, God's measure of success is whether or not He is our one and only master. Jesus said that no man can serve two masters. We cannot serve God and materialism. Some of us think we can be the exception to that rule but God's son said it can't be done. And he said it universally: "No one can serve two masters..." You cannot serve both God and possessions, or earthly goods, or material wealth.

To fail to take Jesus' words seriously is to be a serious failure. Hear me out:

Whatever you accumulate in this life, whatever you accomplish in this life, whatever acclamation you earn in this life, you die a failure unless God is your Master...your one and only Lord.

But to take Jesus seriously is to be liberated from the tyranny of things: to be freed from slavery to people, possessions and performance.

Jesus said, to live with God as your only master requires three things.

I. SINGLENES OF HEART (6:10-21)

Jesus had been teaching about not doing our "acts of righteousness" as mere outward show to be seen by other people. Now he tells us how to avoid this deadly external focus. He says to live with singleness of heart.

¹⁹ "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not

destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...” The Greek is Μη θησαυριζετε υμιν θησαυρους. Don't θησαυριζετε for yourself θησαυρου. Literally, don't treasure up treasures.

This word θησαυρου, “treasure”, is the word from which we get our English word, thesaurus. A thesaurus is a treasure of synonyms and antonyms. It is a treasury of words; a wealth of words.

Jesus says, “Don't treasure up for yourselves treasures on earth. Don't collect for yourselves collections on earth.”

Why not?

- Because it can deteriorate (Jesus spoke about moths and rust).
- Because it can be stolen (Jesus warned about thieves).
- Because it can bind your heart to the earth (Jesus said, where your treasure is, there will your heart be).

Get it? Earthly treasures are insecure, temporary and seductive.

Instead of treasuring up treasures on earth, Jesus said to treasure up treasures in heaven.

Treasures in heaven are those treasures that are valued by our heavenly Father. He is the recognized Lord of heaven and His values are the standard there.

And just exactly what does our heavenly Father treasure? His values are clearly stated in the teachings of Jesus. His values are clearly seen in the life of Jesus. Treasure in heaven is that which has eternal importance because they are important to God. Treasure in heaven is that which is of value to His Kingdom and His work.

- Kindness to God's children is laying up treasure in heaven.
- Character befitting the Bride of Christ is laying up treasures in heaven.
- Investing ourselves in that in which Jesus invested himself...the needy...is laying up treasure in heaven.
- Sharing the Good News of the Kingdom is laying up treasures in heaven.

Where you invest yourself is where your values are. Banks fail. S&Ls fold. Markets crash. Inflation, recession and depression consume your earthly security. Taxes rise. Earnings fall. Things rust and rot. The landfills of today are overflowing with the treasures of yesterday. Is there

nothing in which I can invest that will give real security? Is there no place in which I can invest and receive real assurance for the future?

YES! Decidedly yes! Eternally yes!! Lay up treasures in heaven. Invest time, talent, money and energy in things of the Lord. And know that your heart will follow.

II. SINGLENES OF EYE (6:22-23)

Jesus now turns his attention to our attractions. What attracts you? What turns your head? What gets the focus of your mind?

A minute, infinitesimal percentage of the size or weight of the body is the eye. But it is certainly important! The entire body depends on these two tiny spheres for its perception.

If you have an eye for heavenly things...for eternal values...your whole body will be full of light. But if you have an eye for earthly things...temporal values...your whole body is in the dark.

Have you ever noticed that once you begin to pay attention to a particular thing, you start to see a lot of it? The “reticular activator” is the part of the brain that filters out stimuli. (If it did not filter out stimuli, we would be so bombarded with sensations that we would not be able to cope.) We may be surrounded by something and never notice it until it is brought to our attention. Then, once it is brought to our attention, we begin to see what has been there all along.

For instance, if you buy a silver Chrysler, you may very well begin to see silver Chryslers everywhere you look. They were there all along but you would not have noticed them until you decided to look for them.

When we begin to look for heavenly things, we will see them all around us. When our eye is good, when it has been converted and we are open to heavenly things, we see Kingdom opportunities, Kingdom treasures and Kingdom people all around us.

And when our perspective is bad, we see earthly opportunities, earthly treasures and earthly people everywhere we look.

We must develop singleness of vision, singleness of perspective. We must value with the heart of Christ and see with the eye of Christ.

III. SINGLENES OF LIFE (6:24)

What do you treasure? What do you admire? What gets your affection? What gets your attention? Where is your heart? Where is your eye? Who owns your life?

The investment of your life determines your chance of success. Your master dictates your life. And you can choose your master. You can choose whom you serve.

Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters." And the issue is service not preference. I'm not asking if you prefer Jesus to the things of this world. I'm asking whom you are serving. The one you serve is the one who is mastering you.

A servant belongs to his master 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A servant is totally sold out to his master. A servant is a man or woman who is possessed...possessed by his or her master. A servant is owned by his or her master.

So who or what owns you? Does your job own you? Do you belong to your lusts? Are you possessed by your possessions? Your passions? Your past? Your peers? Whoever calls the shots, whoever sets the demands, that is your master. And you can only serve one. You can be fond of several but you can only serve one. Who or what do you serve?

CONCLUSION:

While touring a beautiful castle with palatial grounds, Dr. Samuel Johnson, the English scholar and historian, said, "These are the things that make it hard to die."

What would make it hard for you to die? What would you have trouble leaving behind? Living like the hypocrites means professing allegiance to God but not really being willing to go home.

It is no coincidence that the very next section of the Sermon on the Mount has to do with worry-free living. When we learn not to live like the hypocrites, we learn not to worry like them, either.

INVITATION: #597 – *"Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated"*