



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 18
Matthew 6:19-21: Topic 17.0

Study By
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Greek NT

6.19 Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν· 6.20 θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ, ὅπου οὔτε σὴς οὔτε βρῶσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ὅπου κλέπται οὐ διορύσσουσιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν· 6.21 ὅπου γάρ ἐστιν ὁ θησαυρὸς σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδιά σου.

Gute Nachricht Bibel

19 Sammelt keine Schätze hier auf der Erde! Denn ihr müsst damit rechnen, dass Motten und Rost sie zerfressen oder Einbrecher sie stehlen. 20 Sammelt lieber Schätze bei Gott. Dort werden sie nicht von Motten und Rost zerfressen und können auch nicht von Einbrechern gestohlen werden. 21 Denn euer Herz wird immer dort sein, wo ihr eure Schätze habt.

NRSV

19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

NLT

19 Don't store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will be safe from thieves. 21 Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

One of the puzzling questions about the Sermon for several centuries has been the seeming tension between the very highly structured material in 5:1-6:18 and the somewhat disorganized presentation of material in 6:19-7:28. The tightly organized material in the first section is clear and reflects a pattern of idea expression that was easy to memorize by Greek speaking believers in the first Christian century. The second section presents challenges. The individual units of material, the pericopes, are well defined, just like in the first section. But how they are fitted together is the question. In the modern era of New Testament scholarship various proposals have been set forth, but most of them have an artificial tone and don't adequately account for the content of the individual pericopes and then for their connection to one another.²

In 1977, Professor Günter Bornkamm, then professor of New Testament at the Heidelberg university theology faculty, presented his presidential address to the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas* on the topic "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt."³ A year later the address was published in the society's journal, *New Testament Studies*. Although the impact of Bornkamm's proposal was minimal in the beginning, over time New Testament scholars began realizing the insights inherent to his proposal. Today most every commentary on the Sermon and/or the Gospel of Matthew will reflect the influence of Bornkamm's understanding of the structure of 6:19-7:28. To be sure, significant modification of the original proposal will be found among differing scholars, but the core idea goes back to Bornkamm.

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²For studies on this see the following in addition to the more detailed commentaries on Matthew 5-7:

Dale C. Allison: *The Structure of the Sermon on the Mount*. In: Journal of Biblical Literature 106 (1987), S. 423-445

Günter Bornkamm: *Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt*. In: New Testament Studies 24 (1978), S. 419-432

Joseph Kürzinger: *Zur Komposition der Bergpredigt nach Matthäus*. in: Bibl 40 (1959), S. 569-589

Martin Vahrenhorst: *Die Bergpredigt als Weisung zur Vollkommenheit : noch ein Versuch, die Struktur und das Thema der Bergpredigt zu finden*. in: Logos - Logik - Lyrik. Engagierte exegetische Studien zum biblischen Reden Gottes (FS Klaus Haacker) Leipzig 2007, S. 115-136

³It should be noted that Professor Bornkamm only presented a proposal for further research and investigation, and not a detailed plan with carefully developed aspects. His objective is consistent with presidential addresses of professional groups of biblical scholars. He sought to set forth an agenda that would challenge others to follow up with more detailed study and presentation at subsequent SNTS meetings. He achieved this objective far better than he imagined at the time of the presentation. His agenda has played a major role in Sermon studies now for almost four decades.

An electronic copy of this study can be accessed at <http://cranfordville.com/Cranfordville/Reources.htm>. These are located under IBC Cologne/Bonn Bible Studies. The study is free and provided as a ministry of C&L Publishing, Inc.

At the heart of his proposal is simply that prayer, and in particular the Model Prayer in 6:9-13, stand as the high point of the Sermon. And prayer stands thus at the heart of discipleship in the Kingdom of Heaven. Relationship with the Heavenly Father is foundational, and prayer is central to that relationship. Mt. 5:13 - 6:8 leads up to this emphasis on praying; Mt. 6:14-7:27 flows out of the praying of the disciple.

How this material connects to prayer, and to the Model Prayer especially, is the major contribution of Bornkamm to the study of the Sermon. In 6:19-7:6 stand six core pericopes: 6:19-21, 22-23, 24, 25-34; 7:1-5, 6. Then comes an exhortation to pray in 7:7-11 using the traditional Jewish command / promise though structure. With the six pericopes one readily sees the vertical / horizontal religious perspective found in the six petitions of the Model Prayer in 6:9-13. Bornkamm and others who followed began to realize that the organizational structure of 6:19-7:28 was built off this pattern. In the series of six antitheses (5:21-47) and three piety contrasts (6:2-18), the Sermon now returns to the number six with six implications (6:19-7:6) of the six petitions in the Model Prayer. These are concluded then with a dramatic encouragement of disciples to pray like this in 7:7-11. Thus the vertical emphasis of prayer sets up the horizontal emphasis of the Golden Rule in 7:12, which matches the horizontal emphasis in 5:13-16 that precedes the largely vertical thrust in 5:17-7:11. The Sermon is concluded with a three fold encouragement to obedience in 7:13-27.

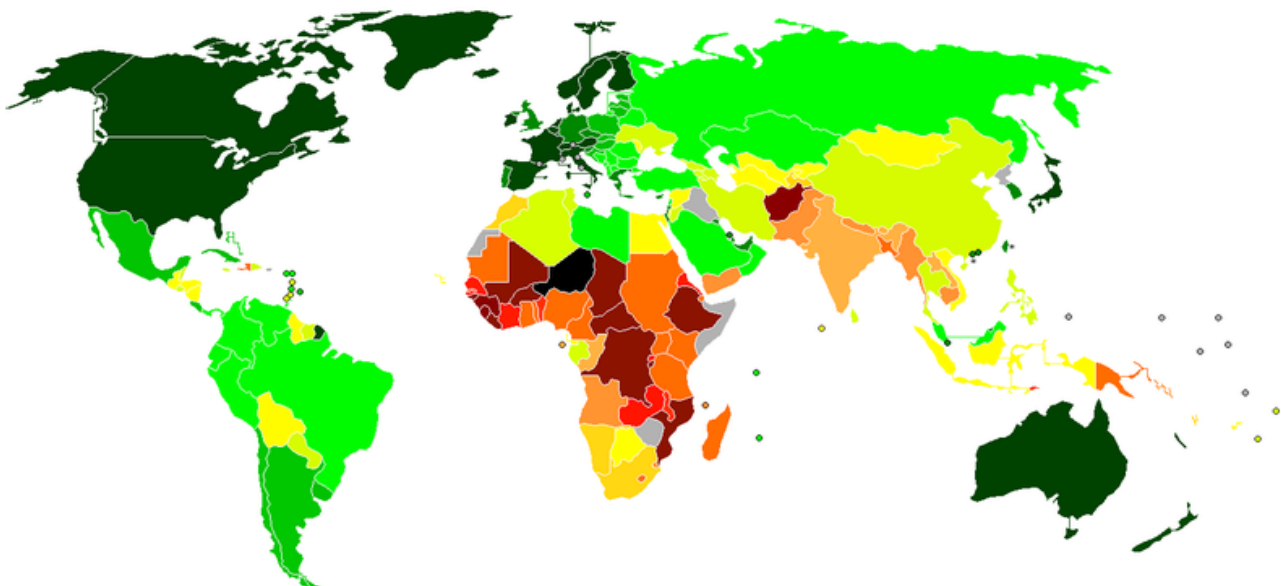
My own investigation of this begin in the late 1970s as I began preparing to teach an advanced Greek exegesis course at the master's degree level while a professor of New Testament at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Ft. Worth. Several years of intensive research went into the preparation to teaching this course at SWBTS, which was later modified for a similar course to undergraduate students at Gardner-Webb University in North Carolina. In 1981-82, I was working as a Visiting Scholar (Gast Wissenschaftler) at the university in Bonn Germany while on a year long Sabbatic Leave from Southwestern Seminary. There I came across Bornkamm's article and examined his ideas in great detail. Slowly I became convinced of the essential correctness of his proposal and thus I incorporated it into the almost 400 page **Study Manual on the Sermon on the Mount** that was published in 1985 for use as the textbook for the Greek exegesis course on the Sermon. Continual study and research since then have further convinced me of the basic correctness of this structural understanding.

The literary structural outline and discussion under **Literary Setting** below will explore in greater detail the implications of this perspective. The exegesis of these next six studies, #s 17-22, will work off this structural perspective.

Historical Context:

The historical setting for Mt. 6:19-21 will focus on the non-religious aspects of wealth accumulation in the ancient world. This stands behind the admonitions found in the passage and will provide the contrastive backdrop for what Jesus seeks to emphasize.

Wealth in the modern world has been measured annually through the United Nations "Human Development Index" since 1990 with the dark green the wealthiest to red the poorest. In this system of



calculation wealth is measured largely by economic power to buy and sell. Per capita income over against cost of living is a major indexing factor, along with life expectancy and adult literacy rates. By this standard the wealthiest countries are the US, Canada, most western European countries, Japan and Australia. The poorest countries are found mostly in central Africa. Everyone else falls somewhere between these two ends of the spectrum.⁴ The category labels of developed, developing, or underdeveloped are then applied. All of this to simply say that wealth determination in the modern world is typically very subjectively perceived. To be wealthy for most people means to have more material resources than I have. Hardly anyone in the developed countries of the world considers themselves to be wealthy. Most people recognize poverty quite easily, and also extreme wealth, which gets extensive coverage through the news media.⁵

Wealth in the ancient world was materialistic to the core as much as modern western society, but in different ways due to the economical dynamics of that era over against those in modern industrial society. Wealth in ancient Rome was the privilege of the aristocratic segment of society. Their world was divided up into rigid classes. You were either slave (the vast majority) or free. And if free, you were non-citizen (the vast majority) or citizen. And if citizen, you were either non-privileged (the majority) or privileged. This meant you were either a senator, an equestrian, or a provincial elite individual.



The senators -- limited by law to 600 individuals -- were the ruling segment of society and ruled only for the benefit of the 'upper crust' of society. In the days of the Republic the upper class were the 'patricians' and the rest were labeled the 'plebeians'. Thus wealth and power went together and belonged only to a very small segment of Roman society. Little opportunity to better one's lot in life existed, apart from an occasional slave obtaining his freedom.

The material symbols of wealth revolved around possession of food, clothes, and money.⁶ James 5:1-6⁷ reflects the dominant negative attitude toward wealth

⁴"The 2009 report was released on October 5, 2009, and covers the period up to 2007. It was titled "Overcoming barriers: Human mobility and development". The top countries by HDI were grouped in a new category called "Very High Human Development". The report refers to these countries as "developed countries".^[1] They are:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Norway 0.971 (▲ 1) | 2. Australia 0.970 (▲ 2) | 3. Iceland 0.969 (▼ 2) |
| 4. Canada 0.966 (▼ 1) | 5. Ireland 0.965 (▬) | 6. Netherlands 0.964 (▬) |
| 7. Sweden 0.963 (▬) | 8. France 0.961 (▲ 3) | 9. Switzerland 0.960 (▬) |
| 10. Japan 0.960 (▬) | 11. Luxembourg 0.960 (▼ 3) | 12. Finland 0.959 (▲ 1) |
| 13. United States 0.956 (▼ 1) | 14. Austria 0.955 (▲ 2) | 15. Spain 0.955 (▬) |
| 16. Denmark 0.955 (▼ 2) | 17. Belgium 0.953 (▬) | 18. Italy 0.951 (▲ 1) |
| 19. Liechtenstein 0.951 (▼ 1) | 20. New Zealand 0.950 (▬) | 21. United Kingdom 0.947 (▬) |
| 22. Germany 0.947 (▬) | 23. Singapore 0.944 (▲ 1) | 24. Hong Kong 0.944 (▼ 1) |
| 25. Greece 0.942 (▬) | 26. South Korea 0.937 (▬) | 27. Israel 0.935 (▲ 1) |
| 28. Andorra 0.934 (▼ 1) | 29. Slovenia 0.929 (▬) | 30. Brunei 0.920 (▬) |
| 31. Kuwait 0.916 (▬) | 32. Cyprus 0.914 (▬) | 33. Qatar 0.910 (▲ 1) |
| 34. Portugal 0.909 (▼ 1) | 35. United Arab Emirates 0.903 (▲ 2) | 36. Czech Republic 0.903 (▬) |
| 37. Barbados 0.903 (▲ 2) | 38. Malta 0.902 (▼ 3) | |

In this report, five countries were promoted from the "medium" category to the "high development" category: Grenada, Peru, Colombia, Turkey, and Lebanon. Furthermore Angola, Lesotho, Uganda and Nigeria left the "low" category and are now in the "medium" group." ["Human Development Index," *Wikipedia* online]

⁵Wealth is often linked to the sociological term 'status symbol,' which signals one's position in society. And it often is a measure of the power and influence that an individual can exert in his world. For more details, see "Status symbol," *Wikipedia* online.

⁶"In the OT wealth must be considered in relation to the synonymous term "riches." Both designate abundance of property (land, buildings, agricultural commodities, livestock, slaves), the basic economic commodity in an agricultural economy such as prevailed in Palestine (for another type of wealth, see MONEY).

"Wealth" is used to translate two Hebrew words, הון and כח, both meaning "faculty," "ability," or "power," which come to have the metaphorical meaning "wealth"--the observable and tangible evidence of the ability to acquire and the power it gives over others. The term "riches" is regularly used to translate the Hebrew root עשר. Originally this root probably meant "abound," but in OT usage the abundance so consistently signifies riches that metaphorical meaning has been lost to literal meaning." [F.W. Young, "Wealth," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach]

⁷James 5:1-6, NRSV: "1 Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you. 2 Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. 4 Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. 5 You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have

found in the New Testament.⁸ The Jewish world of Jesus attached religious significance to being wealthy. Wealth was an individual blessing from God, which implied one was living righteously before God. Conversely, poverty reflected the withholding of divine blessing, presumably because of sinful living. In the class conscious Jewish world of Jesus only a very small segment of society possessed significant wealth, and were almost always connected to Jewish aristocracy. The majority of Jews looked upon wealth very positively. Thus Jesus' condemnation of it here and elsewhere in the gospels struck a radical tone and clearly went against the grain of popular thinking. His views certainly should give modern Christianity pause to reflect on how materialistic



condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.”

2. In Jesus' teaching. The NT term for “wealth” or “riches” is usually *ὁ (τὸ) πλοῦτος*; occasionally *τὰ χρήματα*. Its attitude toward wealth, while consistent with that of the OT, lays added emphasis on its dangers. This emphasis derives from Jesus' own teaching. The saying: “How hard it will be for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:23) clearly illustrates his point of view. It is in relation to his proclamation of the kingdom that Jesus' words on riches must be understood. Jesus is frankly pessimistic about the ability of men who possess wealth to escape being beholden to it. The rich fool is a fool because the security and meaning of his life are rooted in his riches (Luke 12:16 ff). The rich young man finds his zeal for “eternal life” quenched when he is told to give away his possessions and follow Jesus (Mark 10:17 ff). Jesus believed that possessions invariably lay a man in bondage. In his saying: “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24), Jesus draws a sharp line between service to God and service to mammon. He actually personifies riches (see MAMMON), probably to heighten his emphasis on the demonic power which mammon exercises over man. In view of such language it is questionable to speak glibly of riches as a “neutral” quantity in Jesus' view. The facts betray the probability that the person with possessions will fail to commit himself in thought and action to the truth that “a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). And so Jesus positively taught his disciples: “Provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail. ... For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Luke 12:33-34). This was not economic reform in any technical sense. Jesus was combatting the insidious power of possessions to enslave men and destroy their ultimate trust in God and his kingdom. He did not condemn possessions as such. There is no reason to believe he expected the publicans he befriended to quit their remunerative occupation, nor did he expect all who heard him to give up working. The special demands on his close disciples were necessitated by the nature of a particular task. Neither did he commend poverty as such. The poor widow who gave the penny was not praised for her poverty but for the freedom with which she could give all she had in devotion to God (Mark 12:41-44). It was this freedom to sit lightly to one's possessions in wholehearted service to God that was the heart of the matter. Historically speaking, it was the poor of the land who responded to Jesus. When he said: “Blessed are you poor” (Luke 6:20), the word “poor” (see POOR) undoubtedly reflects the religious meaning of the Psalms: Blessed are you who in your destitution humbly await God's gracious action. But more than Jesus' words, his life itself carried his message. For he was a living renunciation of all that might stand between himself and complete trust, devotion, and service to God.

3. In the early church. The early church's attitude consistently reflects Jesus' teaching. This is vividly illustrated in the account of the sharing of possessions in Acts (4:32-35). This communal sharing was not communistic in any modern sense, but shows the early Christians' desire to express their love for one another and their self-abandonment in service to God while they hopefully awaited Christ's imminent return. The apostle Paul urged Christians to work, not only to provide for their own needs (I Thess. 4:11; II Thess. 3:12), but primarily in order that those who had more might help those who had less (II Cor. 8:13-15). Even so, the process of acquiring possessions was to be carried on as if they were not acquiring possessions (I Cor. 7:30-31). i.e., they were to avoid enslavement to either the process or the possessions, both of which were passing away. The Letter of James deplors obsequious praise and deference for the rich -- which inevitably breaks the bond of fellowship of the church (2:1-7). The same letter sternly warns the rich who have gained their wealth through questionable means and who live in luxury and pleasure. A day of reckoning is coming (5:1-6). And so the words: “Come now, you rich, weep and howl.” In I Timothy, Christians are admonished to be content with the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter. Those who desire to be rich fall into temptations and snares that plunge men into ruin (I Tim. 6:8-9). The rich are warned against pride and “setting their hopes on uncertain riches” rather than on “God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy” (6:17). “They are to do good, to be rich in good deeds, liberal and generous, thus laying up for themselves a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life which is life indeed” (vs. 18). The book of Revelation strongly denounces the church at Laodicea for its lukewarmness. “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing; not knowing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev. 3:17). The same author paints a vivid, prophetic picture of the collapse of the whole economy of the Roman world, built, as he believed, on the false grounds of “impure passion,” “wantonness,” “self-glory,” and “deception” (ch. 18). “In one hour all this wealth has been laid waste” (vs. 17). It is a sharp warning against the inevitable idolatry of riches which accompanies denial of God as the supreme source of and answer to man's deepest needs.

In the NT, then, while wealth is not condemned as such, there is a strong pessimism over the possibility of its being a blessing rather than a demonic snare to man. Unfortunately, later efforts to accommodate and rationalize its rigor drastically obscure the stark NT attitude.” [F.W. Young, “Wealth,” *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, iPreach]

it has become.

Literary Aspects:

As is always the case, the literary aspects of the text play an important role in correct understanding of the historical meaning of the text.

Literary Form:

The literary form for verses 19-21 is in its basic structure a ‘saying of Jesus,’ ἡ λογία τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. The pattern of expression reflects similar thought flow to much of the material in 5:17-6:18. The core structure is simply ‘don’t do that; rather do this; here’s why.’ The negative admonition is followed by a positive one and then the reason for both is given. Other thought connections can also be traced. Treasure is linked to reward in much of the preceding material. The contrast between earthly and heavenly is present in the earlier material as well. The shift from the second person plural verbs in statements 94 and 95 (block diagram below) to the second person singular ‘your’ in statement 96 is found in the preceding material as well.

The somewhat similar saying in Luke 12:33-34 poses some interesting questions:

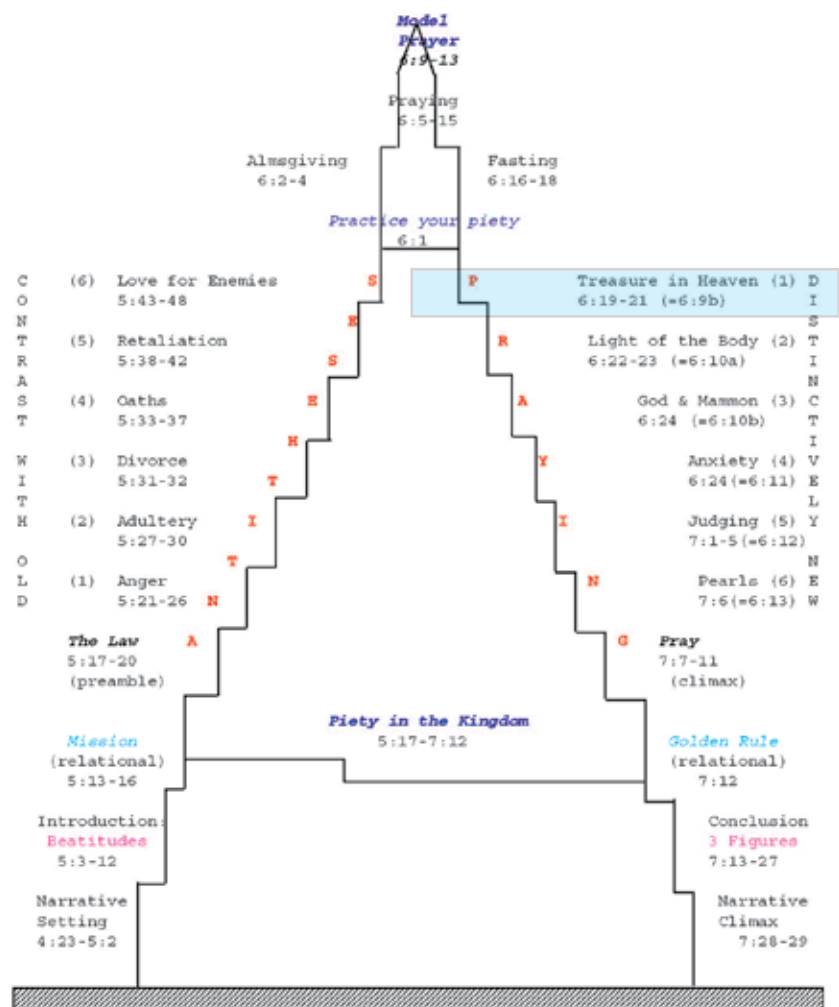
“33 Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

The end of verse 33 and verse 34 pose virtually exact parallels to much of the Matthean text, and reflect identical concepts. In Luke 12:1-59, one finds a rather miscellaneous collection of sayings from Jesus given to either the twelve or to an assembled crowd or to both. Verses 14-40 are addressed to the crowd from which one individual had asked Jesus to become arbitrator over an inheritance dispute between himself and his brother (cf. v. 13). In these verses one hears several echoes of material in Matthew five and six.

We will note in subsequent studies also the parallels between Mt. 6:22-23 // Lk. 11:34-26 and Mt. 6:24 // Lk. 16:13, among additional ones further into the Sermon in Matthew.

The Lukan use stands a little closer to the Jewish tradition in Sirach 29:9-13⁹ and also to Proverbs 23:4-5.¹⁰ Both Matthew and Luke reflect some of the tones of warning found in the Jewish 1 Enoch 94:7-10 though not as strongly.¹¹

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount
Matthew 4:23-7:29



Source: Lerin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988), 320. Adapted from Gunter Bornkamm, "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432.

⁹Sirach 29:9-13 (NRSV): “9 Help the poor for the commandment’s sake, and in their need do not send them away empty-handed. 10 Lose your silver for the sake of a brother or a friend, and do not let it rust under a stone and be lost. 11 Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it will profit you more than gold. 12 Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue you from every disaster; 13 better than a stout shield and a sturdy spear, it will fight for you against the enemy.”

¹⁰Prov. 23:4-5 (NRSV): “4 Do not wear yourself out to get rich; be wise enough to desist. 5 When your eyes light upon it, it is gone; for suddenly it takes wings to itself, flying like an eagle toward heaven.”

¹¹1 Enoch 94:7-10

Literary Setting:

The literary context of vv. 19-21 is best understood within the Model Prayer proposal introduced in the introduction to this study above.¹² The structural outline above highlights this viewpoint. Thus the pattern is as follows:

Mt. 6:9b, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

Praying this petition carries with it the obligation of the following commitment:

Mt. 6:19-21, 19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

When we ask God to make Himself holy in our life and in our world, we have to be focused on Heavenly things ourselves rather than on earthly things, if our petition is to have legitimacy. Otherwise, our petition rings hollow and hypocritical, and will invoke God's wrath rather than His blessing.

Further confirmation of the correctness of this assessment will be seen in the closely related pericopes of 6:22-23 and 6:24 with their counterparts in the Model Prayer of the second and third petitions in 6:10a, b. The conceptual binding of the first three petitions to the first three pericopes in 6:19-24 is dramatic.

Literary Structure:

The diagram of the text will provide insight into the thought structure of these verses.

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94  6:19  Do not store up treasure
           on earth
           where moth and rust corrupt
           and
           where thieves break through and steal;
6:20      but
95      Store up treasure
           in Heaven
           where neither moth or rust corrupts
           and
           where theives do not break through and steal;
6:21      for
           where your treasure is
           there
96      will your heart also be.
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The core thought structure maintains the contrastive pattern seen in each of the antitheses in 5:21-47 and in the three emphases on piety in 6:2-18. The pattern goes "Don't do it that way; instead, do it this way. And here's why." The nature of the contrast in this passage is between earth and Heaven, over against

7 Woe to those who build their houses with sin;
For from all their foundations shall they be overthrown,
And by the sword shall they fall.
[And those who acquire gold and silver in judgement suddenly shall perish.]

8 Woe to you, ye rich, for ye have trusted in your riches,
And from your riches shall ye depart,
Because ye have not remembered the Most High in the days of your riches.

9 Ye have committed blasphemy and unrighteousness,
And have become ready for the day of slaughter,
And the day of darkness and the day of the great judgement.

10 Thus I speak and declare unto you:
He who hath created you will overthrow you,
And for your fall there shall be no compassion,
And your Creator will rejoice at your destruction.

¹²For a detailed study of this structural understanding see Lorin L. Cranford, "Throwing your Margaritas to the Pigs. A Rhetorical Reading of Matthew 7,6." *Gemeinschaft der Kirchen und gesellschaftliche Verantwortung: Die Würde des Anderen und das Recht anders zu denken, Festschrift für Dr. Erich Geldbach*, pp. 351-363. Edited by Lena Lybæk, Konrad Raiser, and Stefanie Schardien. Münster, Deutschland: Lit Verlag, 2004.

true and false piety as in the previous sections. Highly figurative language is employed in this Saying of Jesus that leaves open room for broad application. But careful exegesis of the historical meaning of this language is critical because some of the figures of speech have other meanings in the first century world than the same expression does in modern western society. Huge interpretive mistakes can then be easily made with failure to recognize these differences.

Exegesis of the Text:

Don't store up like that, v. 19: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal" (Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν).

First, what is not to take place. What is Jesus talking about with the term 'treasure'? It's even more important to identify this because a play on words exists in the Greek text that is 'washed out' in the English translation: don't **θησαυρίζετε** **θησαυροὺς**. This the idea of 'treasure' is even more central than the English translation would suggest. F. Hauck provides a helpful summation of both the verb and noun:¹³

thēsauros. a. "What is deposited," "store," "treasure." b. "Place of storage," "warehouse," "treasure chamber or chest" (e.g., temple treasury). The LXX^{14x} has both a. (Josh. 6:19 etc.; also figuratively in Is. 33:6) and b. (Am. 8:5; figuratively in Jer. 51:16 etc.). In Judaism good works are a treasure laid up with God; interest may be paid now, but the capital is kept for the judgment. Eternity is also a treasure house to which the righteous go (cf. Lk. 23:46; Rev. 6:9). The NT has a. "treasure" in the literal sense in Mt. 13:44, with a figurative use in Mt. 12:35 (the heart's treasure), Mt. 6:19ff. (heavenly in contrast to earthly treasures, but with a new urgency and no thought of merit), Col. 2:3 (the treasures of true wisdom and knowledge hidden in Christ), and 2 Cor. 4:7 (the treasure of the new life in Christ that we have as yet only in earthen vessels). The NT also has sense b. ("treasure chest") in Mt. 2:11; 13:52. In sense a. *thēsauros* is important in Gnosticism for the treasure of light and Christ as treasure and pearl. Perhaps Gnostic terminology influenced Col. 2:3, but cf. Is. 45:3.

thesaurizō. "To keep," "hoard," "lay up," especially valuables. In the LXX^{15x} see 2 Kgs. 20:17 and figuratively Am. 3:10. Christ forbids the heaping up of earthly goods as materialistic and egotistical (Lk. 12:21). They may be lost if not renounced, for they carry no security (Mt. 6:19ff.). Acts of love are a storing of treasure in heaven (Mt. 6:20). Paul uses the word literally for the setting aside of weekly offerings in 1 Cor. 16:2 (cf. 2 Cor. 12:14), but in Rom. 2:5 the use is figurative for the storing up of wrath by the impenitent (cf. God's keeping of the present world for judgment in 2 Pet. 3:7).

Within the range of possible meanings for both the noun and the verb, the sense of both here is the accumulation of material things deemed particularly valuable by the individual possessing them. Thus the meaning extends to cover all things material, not just money or wealth. With the repetition of both the verb and the noun in verse 20, the sense in verse 19 stands in contrast to the spiritual or Heavenly accumulation emphasized in verse 20.

One important note. The use of the Greek present tense verb here stresses ongoing action. The forbidding of material accumulation is continuous and extends throughout the lifetime of the disciple.

Second, the location of this accumulation: "on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal" (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν). This spatial designation 'on earth' specifies the accumulation to be taking place in this world. The relative clause 'where...', underscores the transitory nature of this accumulation. Material accumulation does not have safety and permanency. Here Jesus reflects the general understanding of the Old Testament, particularly the Wisdom tradition in Proverbs and Psalms. Life is uncertain and what we possess here does not last.

Clearly Jesus taught against the 'stream' of thinking often present in his day. Wealth is a blessing from God that signals righteousness by the wealth holder. This was popular theology among many in Jesus' day. The Lord bashes this thinking to pieces! No such thing is true. Wealth accumulation is a preoccupation that distracts from God and can be spiritually disastrous. Pursuit of things is not wise in that it occupies our attention on things that don't last and rob us of the broader wholistic understanding of life.

New Testament writers later on will reflect this stance of Jesus in greater detail:

1 Timothy 6:6-10 (NRSV): 6 Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; 7 for we

¹³Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), S.V. F. HAUCK, III, "*thēsauros, thesaurizō*," 136–38.

¹⁴LXX Septuagint

¹⁵LXX Septuagint

brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; 8 but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

Hebrews 13:5 (NRSV): 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, “I will never leave you or forsake you.”

Do store up like this, v. 20: “but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal” (θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ, ὅπου οὔτε σὴς οὔτε βρῶσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ὅπου κλέπται οὐ διορύσσουσιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν).

Here stands the reverse perspective of Jesus. Accumulation of treasure is valid only when the ‘treasure’ is composed of Heavenly things. Here is where the emphasis in Luke 12:33-34 intersects Matt. 6:20-21.

33 Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, **an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.** 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

They also echo the challenge Jesus gave to the rich young ruler in Mk. 10:21 (with // Mt. 19:16-30 // Lk. 18:18-30).

Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, “You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have **treasure in heaven**; then come, follow me.”

Discipleship in the Kingdom of Heaven demands top priority focus on heavenly things. Without such focus no discipleship exists. What is presented as discipleship is but fakery and phoney. Clearly then when we ask God to make Himself holy, that is, special, unique, top priority in our life, we must bring to that prayer a commitment to heavenly realities. Otherwise, our prayer is an insult to God. We are asking Him to take up residence as a Holy God in a dirty vessel that is unwilling to clean itself up.

Here’s why, v. 21: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (ὅπου γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θησαυρὸς σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδία σου.).

This logion of Jesus, introduced by the causal conjunction γὰρ (‘for’) provides the reason for the focus away from worldly accumulation to heavenly accumulation. In the axiom treasure and heart are closely linked. The precise nature of this connection can go one of two directions. The treasure reflects the commitment of the heart to the treasure, or, the heart follows the treasure. Most likely the former is the better understanding.¹⁶

Important here is the understanding that ‘heart’ represents volitional commitment, not emotional feeling, as is the case in modern English language usage. What we value is what we commit ourselves to acquiring -- this is Jesus’ point. If earthly things are our value, then material accumulation will follow. If heavenly things, the spiritual accumulation will follow. Thus, our priorities are critical.

2. What does the text mean to us today?

- 1) Have you ever consciously tried to determine with blunt honesty a list of priorities for your life?
- 2) If so, which items stand toward the top of the list?
- 3) How important are spiritual concerns to you?
- 4) Your praying has no validity without spiritual issues standing at the top of the list. Is that true in your life?

¹⁶“The words of the statement could mean either that the place of investment reveals the commitment of the heart (‘one’s treasure tells the tale of one’s heart’⁸) or that the heart will follow the stockpiled treasure. The former fits better and prepares for v. 24: to love God with all one’s heart (Dt. 6:5)⁹ produces activity that will stockpile treasures in heaven and not on the earth.” [John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew : A Commentary on the Greek Text* in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 2005), 296–299]