



The Sermon on the Mount Study
Bible Study Session 17
Matthew 6:19-21

Study By
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Greek NT

19 Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει, καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν· 20 θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ, ὅπου οὔτε σὴς οὔτε βρῶσις ἀφανίζει, καὶ ὅπου κλέπται οὐ διορύσσουσιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν· 21 ὅπου γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θησαυρὸς σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδιά σου

La Biblia de las Américas

19 No os acumuléis tesoros en la tierra, donde la polilla y la herrumbre destruyen, y donde ladrones penetran y roban; 20 sino acumulaos tesoros en el cielo, donde ni la polilla ni la herrumbre destruyen, y donde ladrones no penetran ni roban; 21 porque donde esté tu tesoro, allí estará también tu corazón.

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.

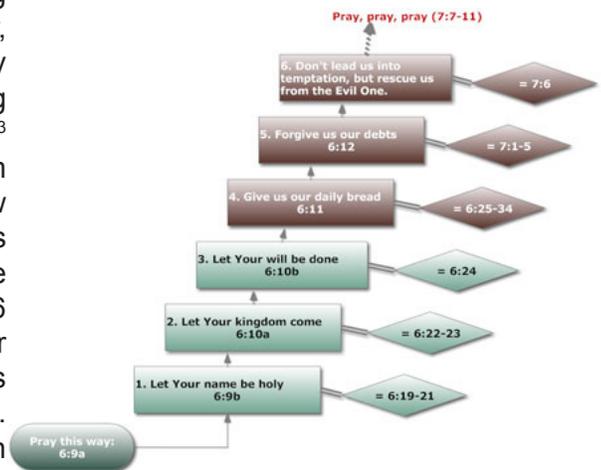
NLT

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 Outline of the Text:¹

One of the critical beginning issues for understanding Mt. 6:19-7:6 is to understand the literary context.² Fortunately, commentaries produced since the 1980s have increasingly grasped the importance of the setting of this text as representing an extension of the six petitions of the Model Prayer in 6:9-13.³ In typical scribal fashion Matthew has shaped this material from his sources⁴ as a commentary on Jesus' instructions on how to pray. Jesus' words stand as His own elaboration of what is expected of disciples when they pray as Jesus taught in the Model Prayer. In this literary structural understanding 6:19-7:6 stand not a random, disconnected thoughts of Jesus -- as older commentaries contended -- but as cleverly organized expansions on the critical importance of proper praying by followers of Jesus. The climax of this comes with 7:7-11 where in parabolic fashion Jesus admonishes disciples to pray, pray, pray because God promises to hear and answer our prayers when prayed according to His instructions.⁵

Role of Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount



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.

²An astounding amount of confusion -- and ignorance -- about the literary setting of this text abounds in the older commentaries. Not until the advent of modern literary critical analysis of texts in the 1970s have scholars come to understand more clearly the role of this passage in the Sermon itself.

³An epoch making study here as a research challenge was given by Günther Bornkamm in his presidential address to the SNTS professional group in 1977, and later released in their journal as "Der Aufbau der Bergpredigt," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1977-78): 419-432. It has subsequently been re-published in numerous places in Europe. During my first sabbatic leave at the University of Bonn in the early 80s, I became aware of this important study. Later I adapted Bornkamm's proposal in my 400 plus page study manual on the Sermon on the Mount for advanced Greek studies by master's students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary [Lorin L. Cranford, *Study Manual of the Sermon on the Mount: Greek Text* (Fort Worth: Scripta Publishing Inc., 1988)]. The next several studies will work off the understanding set forth in this publication.

⁴One senses clearly Matthew's use of sources from the Q material in all of this material where the Lukan parallels are scattered in chapters six, eleven, twelve, and sixteen in the third gospel in random fashion. The Lukan Sermon only parallels this material loosely in Mt. 7:1-6.

⁵Mt. 7:7-11 NRSV: 7 Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. 8 For

Given this understanding of the setting for 6:19-7:6, our text in 6:19-21 extends the first petition of the Model Prayer in 6:9, and can be charted as follows:

(1) Hallowed be your name



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

When we ask God to make Himself unique and holy in our world and in our life, we must have our priorities straight in terms of what really matters in our life. Otherwise, our petition is empty and borders on blasphemy.

One important theme in this passage highlights wealth accumulation. Our day is witnessing the growing inequities in this with the gap between the rich and the poor growing on virtually every continent of our planet. We are now experiencing the early stages of explosive unrest and violence as ever larger numbers of people feel left out of the prosperity in their country. Starvation is real for millions of people today. Jesus alludes to the accumulation of material wealth and warns against it as a top priority in one's life. But what is wealth? And when does one become wealthy? Poverty is relatively easy to identify, but defining wealth is more difficult. Pragmatically, most people define it as "having more than I have." But this is highly subjective and provides no real basis for defining wealth. In our day, there is the Human Development Index sponsored by the United Nations that seeks to define poverty and wealth globally from three vantage points: life expectancy at birth; access to knowledge; and standard of living. Complex mathematical formulas are used to calculate a numerical index rating of the various countries of the world in a uniform fashion on a scale of zero to one thousand.⁶ But sociologically wealth possession is closely linked to 'status symbol,' and is related to power and influence over others.

These factors are especially important when assessing the idea of wealth in the ancient world. The ancient Roman empire was ever bit as materialistic as modern western society. But Rome had accumulated its wealth largely through military conquest and plundering of conquered peoples. Slavery was the economic backbone of wealth for the less than six per cent of the population that controlled over 95 per cent of the wealth. The situation wasn't much better among the Jews in Palestine, although their economy was not so slave oriented. The key to wealth in both Roman and Jewish society had to do with ancestry. Aristocratic society possessed the wealth and passed it on largely by birth and inheritance. Economic mobility was very limited, although possible somewhat more among Romans than among Jews. To the Jewish mentality was added the religious dimension that wealth came from God as a blessing for being righteous. Never mind whether one was righteous nor not in reality, the mere possession of wealth was taken to mean that you were righteous before God. This added a "divine right" to wealth among aristocrats, and generated the thinking that you used it for yourself and shared very little of it.

The unquestionably negative attitude of Jesus and the apostles toward wealth⁷ found in the New Testament arose out of this ancient Jewish context. For Jesus to juxtapose material wealth against spiritual blessing, as He did in this passage, was radical thinking that didn't go over well at all. James 5:1-6 is one of the most severe condemnations of wealth found in the Bible.⁸

Some background attention to the Lukan parallel in 12:33-34 is important also.

33 Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. 9 Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? 10 Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

⁶In the 2010 report released Nov. 4, 2010, Costa Rica stands as #62, while Panama is at #54 and Zimbabwe is at the bottom of the list of 169 countries included. The US stands at #4 and Canada at #8, until injustices, i.e., "an Inequality-adjusted Human Development Index," are factored into the equation. Canada remains at #8, but the US drops to #12 on this list.

⁷For a somewhat helpful online discussion see Craig L. Blomberg, "Wealth," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Too much western mentality is read back into the scripture references in the article, but it does call attention to the core concepts in the Bible.

⁸Jas. 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 condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

also.⁹

Luke stands closer to the Jewish tradition found in Proverbs 23:4-5¹⁰ and in Sirach 29:9-13.¹¹ Both Matthew and Luke reflect the warning found in the earlier Jewish writing of 1 Enoch 94:7-10.¹² As a gospel writer Luke tends to come down the harshest on wealth accumulation of any New Testament writer,¹³ although James is close behind him.

Our passage calls for a prioritizing of one's life around spiritual values over against material values. This is a powerfully needed message to the materialistic western culture. And also a severe condemnation of the 'health / wealth' heresy preached falsely by a few these days in the name of Christ.

I. Storing up treasure, vv. 19-20.

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.

19 Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει, καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν· 20 θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῶ, ὅπου οὔτε σὴς οὔτε βρῶσις ἀφανίζει, καὶ ὅπου κλέπται οὐ διορύσσουσιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν.

Note the Lukan parallel in 12:33b: "Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys" (ποιήσατε ἑαυτοῖς βαλλάντια μὴ παλαιούμενα, θησαυρὸν ἀνέκλειπτον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ὅπου κλέπτῃς οὐκ ἐγγίξει οὐδὲ σὴς διαφθείρει). The essential idea is the same, although the wording and imagery are different.

Storing up: Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν / θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν. In both the negative and then the positive commands, the Greek present tense imperative verb from θησαυρίζω is used; the implication of this is to issue commands that define ongoing actions of 'storing on.' The negative command demands such action to stop, while the positive command demands the action not as a one time act, but rather as a fundamental continuous action. But what is 'storing up'? F. Hauck (Kittel's *TDNT*, p. 136) notes this:

thesaurizō. "To keep," "hoard," "lay up," especially valuables. In the LXX 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).

The Greek verb in a saying, such as our passage, refers generally to stockpiling things for future use as a means of securing the future. We set aside more than is needed for today so that there will be something available tomorrow.

Treasure: θησαυροῦς. Just a casual notice reflects the play on words present in the Greek but lost in the translation: don't being treasuring up treasures; be treasuring up treasures. Once again F. Hauck's observations are helpful:

thēsaurós. a. "What is deposited," "store," "treasure." **b.** "Place of storage," "warehouse," "treasure chamber or chest" (e.g., temple treasury). The LXX 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

⁹33 πωλήσατε τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ὑμῶν καὶ δότε ἐλεημοσύνην· ποιήσατε ἑαυτοῖς βαλλάντια μὴ παλαιούμενα, θησαυρὸν ἀνέκλειπτον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, ὅπου κλέπτῃς οὐκ ἐγγίξει οὐδὲ σὴς διαφθείρει· 34 ὅπου γὰρ ἐστὶν ὁ θησαυρὸς ὑμῶν, ἐκεῖ καὶ ἡ καρδία ὑμῶν ἐστὶν.

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.

¹¹Ben Sira 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.

¹²7 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.

¹³This reality lies behind the preference for the Gospel of Luke among liberation theologians in the developing world.

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.

The point of the term is to designate something considered valuable and needful both now and tomorrow.

The choice of storage places: ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς / ἐν οὐρανῷ. Wrong place: ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σῆς καὶ βρώσις ἀφανίζει, καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν. Proper place: ἐν οὐρανῷ, ὅπου οὔτε σῆς οὔτε βρώσις ἀφανίζει, καὶ ὅπου κλέπται οὐ διορύσσουσιν οὐδὲ κλέπτουσιν. Jesus demands that His disciples not make accumulation of things connected to this world our point of commitment. Instead, spiritual ‘treasures’ located in Heaven are to be the point of accumulation. The contrastive ‘where’ clause signals the negative and positive aspects of the storage location. Valuables stored on earth are transient and uncertain; but valuables stored in Heaven are not subject to these limitations.

One should note that the heavenly treasures are not spiritual merit accumulated against the Day of Judgment. The above listed use of the Greek word for ‘treasure’ in the remainder of the New Testament makes this clear. Instead, Jesus was alluding to the spiritually valuable things of wisdom, understanding of Christ, fuller experiencing of life in Christ, and most importantly the treasure that eternal life with God in Heaven has.

II. The basis for storing up treasure, v. 21.

21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

21 ὅπου γάρ ἐστιν ὁ θησαυρός σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδιά σου

Note the Lukan parallel in 12:34: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (ὅπου γάρ ἐστιν ὁ θησαυρός ὑμῶν, ἐκεῖ καὶ ἡ καρδιά ὑμῶν ἔσται). The wording is very close in Luke to Matthew.

One should note that ‘heart’ in the New Testament is primarily volitional, and not emotional. Jesus’ provides in verse 21 the reason for the above admonitions. What we value we will commit ourselves to -- this is the essence of Jesus’ statement. The location of our heart, our priority, will be largely guided by what we value.

The rest of the New Testament acknowledges the same principle:

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

The Bible is not against having material wealth, but it does recognize huge dangers in seeking it especially with high priority. This ran very counter to the prevailing attitude of the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day, and in ours.

Diagram of the Sermon on the Mount Mt. 5:21-26

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;

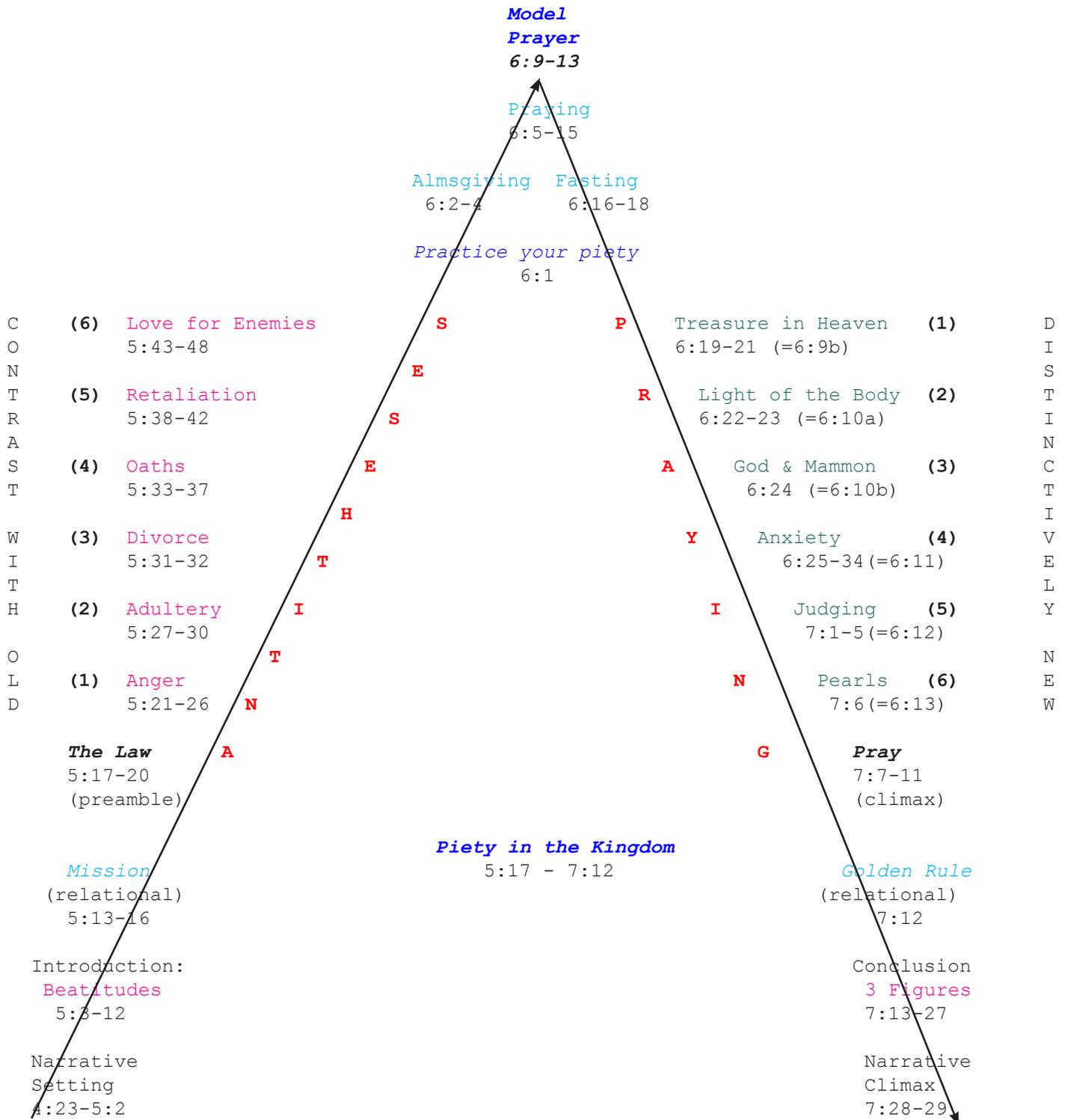
6:21 for
where your treasure is
there

96 **will your heart also be.**

The literary structure of 6:19-21 is very simple. Statements 94 and 95 put antithetical admonitions about 'storing up' on the table, and statement 96 gives the reason for the two admonitions. "Treasure" represents priority and "heart" signals one's commitment. The adverbial local clauses, "where...", identify the nature of one's priorities, either as material or as spiritual. The contrast between the two is built off of permanence and durability. Material things don't last while spiritual things last forever.

The Literary Structure of the Sermon on the Mount

Matthew 4:23-7:29



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