

What Are You Afraid Of?

In this series of articles we're looking at the biblical teaching that our unhealthy fear and anxiety are caused by misplaced trust. We can often place our trust in things and people that were never intended to bear that weight of responsibility. We're never to hoard or to place our ultimate trust in earthly wealth, but as God blesses us we're to bless others in Jesus' name. In the gospel of Luke we're brought face to face with a man who is very wealthy. This man comes to Jesus to inquire of him how he may inherit eternal life. Jesus begins by saying, "You know the commandments. Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother...." In his arrogance—or maybe foolishness—this rich young man replies, "I've done this since I was a youth." Jesus, in great wisdom, replies, "There's one thing you lack. Sell all that you have and give it to the poor and you'll have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." Jesus is not saying that our works of obedience make us fit for heaven but rather, he knew this man's heart and he knew the very thing that came directly between this man and God. His trust was in his earthly wealth and Jesus wanted him to face this reality.

Misplaced trust is not merely a problem that affects non-Christians. In the sermon that we've been looking at from Matthew's gospel, Jesus is teaching that even those who are kingdom citizens will, at times, have this same problem. As we go back to our text in Matthew, Jesus makes a contrast between "earthly" and "heavenly treasures." "...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where thieves do not break in and steal." What are these "heavenly treasures?" Simply stated, these are the treasures that have eternal value, including using our wealth, time and opportunities to help others. "[The rich in this present age] are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of what is truly life." (1 Timothy 6:18-19)

There are a number of scriptures that speak directly of heavenly reward including, Matthew 5:12; 46; 6:6; 10:42; 25:40; 2 Corinthians 4:17. It is in these "heavenly treasures" that we must find the greatest value. True success is not defined as having more earthly wealth and possessions, but in being delivered from trusting in earthly wealth and possessions. We show how much we truly trust God when we place our ultimate trust in him rather than in the gifts that he's given us.

Believing that earthly wealth is all that we need for ultimate security has deceived many. In Mark's gospel we read of Jesus' teaching on the parable of the sower/soils. Jesus taught that the seeds that were sown represent the word of God. Some of the seeds fell among the thorns which speaks of "...those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things come in and choke the word [in our lives]." This parable clearly teaches us that earthly riches and all the "other things" that we can convince ourselves will bring us happiness and security won't in the end. When we trust God

enough that we're consistently looking to him to graciously meet our deepest needs; when we trust God enough that, by grace, we're willing to pour out ourselves for the good of others; when we trust God enough that we're glad to take the opportunity to give generously of our time, talents and treasures; when we live as if we really believe that God is the giver of all that's truly good in our lives and that we're merely stewards of those blessings then, and only then, will we begin to be free from the fear of what may happen if we should lose our earthly treasures. This misplaced trust is the cause of much of the unhealthy fear and anxiety that is in our lives and this is exactly how Jesus summarizes this first section: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

In other words, if I am placing my ultimate trust in things that are destined to perish, this will express itself in an unhealthy fear and anxiety should I lose those things. Christian, what are you afraid of?

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