Westlake Church Lausanne

Heart, Eyes and Hands

I want to begin by reading to you the introduction to a book entitled "Affluenza" - now in its 3rd edition

Affluenza - a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more. The authors first coined this term, affluenza, back in 2001, to describe a disease that has gripped the western world.. our desire for more and more stuff… in other words… materialism. Where the only thing that matters, is the material… what we see and touch. Where the stuff of this world, is the only thing worth living for
… and so we become consumed by the dogged pursuit of more

But this is not a new phenomenon!
It was 2000 years earlier that this condition was first diagnosed… by Jesus…
and this affluenza… this materialism… poses a great threat to every Christian and their relationship with God.
And friends, this is why living in Switzerland is a dangerous place to live!
… because of civil unrest - no
… because there are blue ringed octopi living in the the lake - no
… because of black widow spiders under the toilet seat - no

But because in Switzerland, like many countries in the wealthy west… pursuit of material things is perfectly acceptable, and indeed it is positively encouraged
Which means that like any church in the wealthy west, there is a danger that this is a blind-spot for us too.

This is why our passage for today, where Jesus teaches his followers about a right attitude… a right appreciation, and a right caution towards material things
… is just as relevant for us here this morning in 2016, as when Jesus first spoke these words

Jesus asks us 3 questions in these verses, so let's tackle each in turn…

#1 - What does your heart treasure?

Jesus begins by speaking about 2 types of treasure… one that the Christian is not to be characterised by, and one that they are…

So firstly in v19 (&20) Jesus says "DO NOT lay up for yourselves treasures on earth" And then qualifies this by speaking of things that do not last. So I think it is clear that what Jesus particularly has in mind… signs of material wealth that don't last. Moths eat fine linen clothes, thieves steal precious items, rust eats through the nice car, fancy things fade and break with age.

Now it's important to say at this point that Jesus is not prohibiting prudent saving, nor is he condemning the wealthy, any more than he is condemning people who wear clothes!

For example in the OT, in Proverbs, the ant is commended for storing up food in the summer, so as to have enough in the wintertime. And in the NT too, the Christian is encouraged to take responsibility for providing for themselves and their family, rather than sponging off other people
The Bible contains good advice on using our wealth well and saving wisely.

What Jesus is against is the 'love' of money, the 'hoarding' of wealth, a 'trust' in material things.
The issue here is not so much what we have, but what we treasure
… owning stuff is not the issue… but loving it, is!

Because… where our heart is, there our treasure is also! (v21)
… Now the heart in Jewish understanding was not just the seat of your emotions, but the very driving force of your life…. it encompassed your ambitions, desires, priorities… Everything!

And Jesus is saying that what you treasure most in life will define you.
What we value most highly will affect the decisions we make, the ambitions we have, the goals we set ourselves. Jesus is warning against the love of material things… and so becoming consumed by them… and the "the dogged pursuit of more"

Last Sunday a new snowboarding movie was released… it documents a 3 year adventure by a chap called Travis Rice… for those of you who don't know, he is generally regarded as the best freestyle snowboarder in the world
Here is what one of his closest friends said about him,
"He puts all his time and energy into what he's obsessed with"
… hence the movie is all about his pursuit for perfect snow and the perfect ride
But what about us…?

If the past 3 years of your life were made into a movie, granted it may not be as radical as this one, but what would it show we were pursuing?
… or in the language of Jesus… what would it highlight as the treasure of our hearts?
… would it show our laying up of treasure on earth?… or as Jesus says in v21: the laying up of treasures in heaven?

Now interestingly, Jesus does not define for us what these heavenly treasures are… but he does stress their location and longevity
… in contrast to earthly treasure which is temporal
… he speaks of heavenly treasure which is eternal

So whereas the new suit is one day thrown away, the new car rusts eventually, and the new house may have the latest security features, but one day that will crumble and fall too.
… treasures in heaven however… neither moth nor rust destroys, and thieves cannot steal, and the stock market cannot influence

Now I think the verses from last week help us understand this a bit more…
If you remember, there was a contrast between the religious hypocrite who does showy stuff in public… and so they receive their reward when?… in the here and now… on earth…
… their reward is the praise of other people… that was the treasure their heart desires
… and they were in sharp contrast to the believer who gives, and prays, and fasts in secret… their reward teaches Jesus, will be in heaven

… why?… because the treasure their heart desires, is greater fellowship with their father in heaven. Their actions reflect what they cherish… not the praise of others, but fellowship with the father. At its simplest… when our heart desires treasure in heaven… it desires our Father in heaven!

And so in this way… the prayer that Jesus teaches us, can help us think thru where our treasure is…
… do we treasure our father in heaven, more than our funds on earth
… do we treasure his holy name, or the reputation we gain thru the stuff we acquire
… do we treasure his kingdom, more than building our own kingdom
… do we treasure doing His will on earth as in heaven, more than what we stand to inherit from the will of another, here on earth?

You see, if our heart desires treasure in heaven, then we will be concerned with the things of God, who is in heaven… things which last for eternity.
So rather than being concerned with praise from others on earth, for how religious we look, or how much stuff we have
… we will be concerned with deepening our fellowship with our father in heaven, through giving and praying and fasting, stuff that no one on earth sees… but our father in heaven does!

But if that is the vertical aspect, there is also a horizontal aspect too…

Just turn quickly with me to 1 Timothy 6vv17-19a

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure

… 2 things - firstly, v17… reminds us that material things are not evil, money of itself is not evil - it is neutral…
but rather than put our hope, our trust in money… (love of money is a root of all kinds of evil 6v10)
… we are actually to enjoy the good gifts God gives us

Secondly, v18- some help as to what storing up treasure in heaven is, as the apostle Paul understands it…
It will mean being generous with our money in this present age… investing in good works… investing our money in supporting good gospel work. Such work always needs money, and the only people who will give to gospel work are Christians - because only the Christian grasps how significant it is

This is an investment that will last…. "treasure" that will last for all eternity
similarly, it will mean investing our time in people… sharing Jesus with them, reading the bible with them, encouraging them, praying with them… these good works are of eternal value

… It's not that we can buy our place in heaven by doing all these things… but it's because we are saved by God's grace… that we treasure the opportunity to be involved in these things

What we most value, will shape our priorities,
And so the question to ask ourselves is, "Do I value God's treasure more than what this world has to offer?"
… when my mind wanders, what do I day dream about, think about, worry about, or measure the value of other things (and other people) by?

#1 - what does your heart treasure?

2nd question…

#2 - Are your eyes healthy?

Now to be honest, on first reading vv22-23, it is not immediately obvious how this all fits together… Jesus words about treasure at the beginning, and then money at the end, well that is all of a theme… but why does Jesus talk about the eye?

Well let's look at what Jesus says…
Jesus talks about a good eye being like a lamp and so providing light to the whole body
A bad eye on the other hand… gives no light and so the body is in darkness
and then end of v23… if the light that the bad eye lets in is only darkness, then that is really bad - how great is the darkness!!

In other words, if your eyes are not working… then even if you are surrounded by light, you will still be in darkness… and that makes it hard to function properly…
If we have healthy eyesight… we function properly… bad eyesight.. we don't
But Jesus is not giving us a lesson on physical eyesight.
He's making a spiritual point.
He is saying that just as the eye affects the whole body… so our spiritual eyesight, our spiritual focus affects our whole life. … determines our whole spiritual well-being

The word Jesus uses here for "healthy" is literally single minded.
singleness of purpose… undivided loyalty to God and the things of God
… treasuring the things of God, rather than this world

So if our spiritual eyes are single-mindedly focused on God and the heavenly treasure we should be storing up, then our whole spiritual lives will be full of light. But if our spiritual vision is clouded by materialism and selfishness, then our whole lives will be affected.

We all know the symptoms of influenza, or "flu" as it commonly known - makes your nose run, and eyes water
Well how much more serious is affluenza - Jesus teaches us it is like a spiritual cataracts… stops us seeing clearly!
… it stops us focussing on God
And so Jesus gives us a strong warning not to deceive ourselves on this…
… there is nothing worse than someone who thinks their eye is healthy… full of light… when in fact it lets in only darkness… as Jesus says, "how great then is the darkness!!"

And yet, as with physical eyesight, the gradual deterioration of our spiritual eyesight can be quite subtle… especially when it comes to materialism
… because we can always point to someone else who seems more materialistic than us
… nicer holidays… bigger house.. more extravagant lifestyle
… and so we conclude we are fine
…but Jesus is not asking us to check other peoples eyes… but our own

and so just as we visit the optician for a physical eye test, it's good for us to have a spiritual eye test?
… do we see that the things of this world will not last
… do we recognise how vulnerable they are… to moth or rust or thieves?
… do we see how insignificant those things are, in comparison to the inheritance God has for us that will never perish, spoil or fade away?
Do we see that clearly?

And what about our children?
… do they understand that ultimate security is not found in being set up financially… but by being established in our Lord Jesus Christ?
As their parent, are you helping them develop a healthy eye?
Are we encouraging them to

Turn their eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
where the things of earth
Will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Well finally…

#3 - Whom are you serving?
Using a typically Jewish turn of phrase… taking 2 extremes, love and hate… Jesus' point is pretty clear isn't it?… you cannot serve 2 masters… you cannot serve God and money
re-read v24

Now for us in the 21st century, we struggle with this a bit, because many employees have two masters. People often work for several different employees… even Superman had to work 2 jobs!
But that is not the illustration Jesus is using… he is using the illustration of slavery… to make the point that you and I can only have one master.
That is to say, only one person can own you and me, and it will either be money or God.
And the result of that is that we will either hate/despise the Lord and love/be devoted to money… or hate/despise money and love/be devoted to the Lord.
It's one or the other.

Actually the word money there, in the original, is Mammon, which in Jesus' day refers to any material thing - the earthly stuff we are tempted to treasure in v19… at which point you might be think - "but i don't serve money, money serves me!"
well it can… but does it…?

The time when Jesus meets the rich young ruler, is a sobering encounter!
He asks Jesus how he can inherit enteral life… Jesus' answer is simple, he must stop desiring earthly treasure and follow Jesus
…no longer live for his material wealth, but live for Jesus
… the rich young ruler , we are told, goes home sad, because he could not leave his many possessions

Who had whom?
… did that man have a grip on his possessions, or did his possessions have a grip on him?
who served whom?
did his possessions serve him, enabling him to be generous… or did he serve them?

And how about us?… are we in control of our money, our possessions… if you were asked to give away 50% of your capital, could you… would you?… who controls who?
Where do we find our significance and in what do we place our trust?
… do you have control of your wealth, or does it have control of you?

By his actions, it is clear who the rich young ruler is serving
… and it is the same with us

As we draw to a close it's worth thinking thru the reason Jesus says we cannot serve both God and money…? … it's because we think we can… we think we are the exception
sure i can serve God on Sundays… and maybe at a mid-week group in the evening
… but then it's ok to serve mammon the rest of the week!
but Jesus says…
… you cannot serve God and money
… true most people can't but I….
… no Andy.. you cannot serve God and money
… well you say that Jesus but…
… ANDY, you cannot serve God and money!

So if we think we have managed to somehow balance the two, Jesus says we're wrong
… it is an Illusion to think we can have a bit of both at same time
When Theo was just a toddler, he would sometimes sit in the car and play while I washed the outside
He would sit there and pretend to drive the car - turning the steering wheel - playing with the radio and indicators and making car noises
... But of course the key was not in the ignition, and the handbrake was on
He would think he is driving the car - but he is only pretending - he is not actually driving
And Jesus here urges us to make sure we are not pretending at serving God, and God alone

If we serve God, we will have an attitude of satisfaction and contentment with what we have…. Second best is fine, if it does the job.
This will also mean that we will not resent those who have more than us, or look down on those who have less

…to live like that, in a society consumed by the dogged pursuit for more… contentment with what we have, is a wonderful witness.

Of course there will be times when we fail…
At such times we need to remember first of all, that our heavenly treasure is not in jeopardy

Secondly, we need to ask forgiveness, knowing that we will be forgiven, because Jesus has paid the price for all our sins - including those times when we do not put God first

And thirdly we need to reset our perspective - and hear Jesus' words again...
... check our hearts, check our eyesight, and endeavour to serve God alone in the week ahead