

Resolutions

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Matthew 6.19-34

You Might Not Have Thought Of

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I. Connecting With One Another

What is it about a New Year that prompts people to make resolutions? Are you among the 45% of Americans who always make these resolutions? The 17% who sometimes make them? OR the 38% who never make resolutions? Do you know the number one New Year's resolution? (See the back page to find out).

II. Introduction to this Study

Resolutions you might not have thought of. We've looked at the resolution to "eat together" and enjoy the richness of significant fellowship - with family and friends at common meals, at the communion table with the Living Lord, and digesting God's Word together. We also considered the resolution to "sleep in" by being sure to find a day for true Sabbath rest; time to break the routine of the other six days in the week, slow down, relax, put our feet up, and be delightfully aware of the presence of Jesus.

This week we turn to another resolution "keep the weight off." Not the weight gained over the Christmas holidays, but the weight of worry. How can we re-align the focus of our lives in such a way that worry will not weigh us down?

III. Study the Text

- a. Begin with Matthew 19-24. Read through this section and try to summarize the priorities Jesus emphasizes.

Now look at verses 19-21. How would you define what Jesus means by "treasures on earth" and "treasures in heaven?" Are earning a living, building savings, planning for retirement among those earthly treasures Jesus is talking about? Could they be?

What does storing up treasures in heaven look like?

Picture yourself living in a home built of stone and mud. Your money is kept in a clay jar. Would you feel vulnerable? Might you become pre-occupied with protecting that money?

Imagine you just bought 1,000 shares of Google stock (okay it would cost you a million dollars so that may not be realistic) what do you imagine would be the first thing you might be tempted to do tomorrow morning? Would that be an example of "where your treasure is there your heart will be also?"

- b. In verses 22-23 Jesus turns to the metaphor of eyes as the light of the whole person. In the context of treasures on earth and in heaven, what do "good" (better translated as healthy or generous) eyes suggest. What do "bad" (better translated evil or unhealthy or stingy) eyes suggest? What is Jesus' point? How does he want his followers to "see"?

- c. Verse 24 summarizes Jesus' concern about our priorities. It's clear cut - a person cannot be fully devoted to two different masters. Look at James 4.4. How does this help explain verse 24?
- d. Now we continue into Matthew 6.25-34. Notice the "therefore". Because followers of Jesus are to be single-minded, focused on God's priorities, committed to God's present reign and activity in the world... "I tell you do not worry..." How are the words about treasures (in 19-24) and worry related?
- e. Verses 25-27, is Jesus suggesting we do not make any effort to secure food and drink? What point is he making about worry, about basic provisions, about God's care, about our priorities, and about the focus of our lives? Think some more about worry. What causes people to worry? How do people get weighed down by worry? Is there such a thing as "legitimate worry?" The Greek word "merimnate" that is translated "worry" in the NIV means "be anxious" or "to have anxiety." How does anxiety differ from worry; or does it?
- f. Let's go on to verses 28-30. Jesus turns to worry about clothing. Is he suggesting we not wear clothes or spend money on clothing? (I hope not, too) What is he emphasizing? What is the priority Jesus wants us to focus on?
- g. So what are we to do? Look at verses 31-32. What is the key to not worrying according to these verses? Where does Jesus say our focus should be so that we are not weighed down by worry? How does Jesus' command to "seek first" (that means "to strive or seek after") the kingdom of God (God's reign, God's rule in this world, God's present activity on earth) and God's righteousness (the kind of life God requires) free us from worry and anxiety? Where is our focus when we do this?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Look at 1 Peter 5.6-7. When you are weighed down by anxiety, what steps can you take according to these verses? How does humbling oneself begin the process of re-focusing the gaze of our inner person? How does the active effort of casting or throwing our cares on God free us from the weight of worry? What cares and weights of worry do you need to throw off onto the loving and caring shoulders of the living God?
- b. How do you need to re-align the focus of your "eyes" (that is, your inner person)? Are your priorities in line with those of the Kingdom of God? How can you be more focused on and trusting in the presence of Jesus?

V. Pray

- a. Ask God to pour out the Holy Spirit into you, into our church, so that we will bear fruit by helping others know Jesus and be his disciples.
- b. Pray for yourself and those you know to trust in the Lord, and know that he cares for you and them.

(Here are the top ten New Year's resolutions:

Lose weight, get organized, spend less and save more, enjoy life to the fullest, get fit and healthy, learn something new and exciting, quit smoking, help others achieve their dreams, fall in love, spend more time with others. Percent of people making resolutions who actually keep them: 8, yes, eight percent.)