# Trust as a Foundation

This was my fourth and final TIM talk. We, as a group, were going through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and I was assigned to do a talk on Matthew 6:19—34. I struggled a bit with the passage and eventually decided to take as the main theme something which is very relevant to me at the moment: trusting God through my impatience in a personal matter.

The talk was presented on 16 September 2009.

## The Talk

> [19]"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20]But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21]For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
> [22]"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. [23]But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!
> [24]"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.
> [25]"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? [26]Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? [27]Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?
> [28]"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. [29]Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. [30]If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? [31]So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' [32]For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. [33]But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. [34]Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. – Matthew 6:19—34 (NIV)

How highly do you value your friends and loved ones whom you have trusted completely? People with whom you have shared your secrets, desires and ambitions. How would you feel if the secrets and feelings you shared with them were betrayed to other people? I'm sure that is more than an academic question: I am confident that everyone here has had an experience of being betrayed, has memories of the resulting hurt and a legacy of a resolve to not trust so easily again.

Trust is something which is terribly important to everyone: every person has the need to be able to trust. And the passage we are looking at today is all about trust.

We are continuing with our series of talks on Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Previously we have seen that Jesus has shown that sin lies within our hearts and not within our deeds. He then went on to elaborate that we therefore cannot be saved by our good deeds, because even our apparent good deeds (and abstinence of bad deeds) are marred by selfish and wicked motives.

But in the part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount at which we are looking at today, a change of tone takes place. Jesus again points to weaknesses in the nature of all human beings—lack of trust and hope in God—but this time offers hope by extending an invitation to people to ultimately place their trust in God.

After having demonstrated to His audience that their salvation cannot possibly come to pass by their own actions, Jesus sets the tone for a new message: the message of salvation for which He was sent. And the first thing necessary to digest this new message is a little trust. Having shown that people aren't in control of their own salvation, they absolutely need to trust that God is.

Jesus starts off this part of His sermon by talking about treasures. Jesus is speaking in terms of earthly treasures, but the treasures He actually means is that of ultimate reward. v. 21: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be.” So, in other words, there were you trust your greatest reward will be (here on earth or only in heaven), for that cause you will work the hardest and care the most. When some people die, their “worth” is measured in accumulated wealth. But after they move on from this earth, their possessions remain behind. Others still are measured by their legacy of deeds. But eventually their works will be forgotten, or become moot when the world eventually passes away. But in heaven, where the presence of God will be forever, there one must seek your reward.

The next couple of verses, vv. 22—23, may seem a bit odd. But what Jesus is saying when He speaks of eyes, light and darkness is simply more about trust: if we trust in God, He will fill us up and we shall be able to walk in His light. But if we don't trust in Him, if we shut Him out, our spirits will be dark and desolate. Think for a moment how it would be to have all of your senses taken away from you: consider floating in a void, without anyone being able to communicate to you through the utter darkness. Or you to them. If you are like me, you would get panicky just by the thought of being in that position. Blind, deaf and mute: that is how we would be going through the world without trust in God. And that feeling of isolation won't come close to when the full implication of mistrusting God is revealed.

But mistrusting God is easy, because we have two important sources of strength: ourselves and others. We have the freedom to make up our own plans and seek comfort in other people. By our wisdom, we plug the holes in our souls with money, academics, romance, possessions and all sorts of painkillers. But one day our plans will fail us when they come to naught. This is what Jesus is speaking about in v. 24: we only able to serve Him, or someone or something else. We only have time to gather our treasures in one place, not the other. Heaven, or not in heaven.

But some people do not find their comfort in their private yachts or still their pain with leisurely pursuits: some people struggle just to survive, let alone thrive. Indeed, even if someone chooses a spartan lifestyle, they still have basic needs: food, clothes and shelter. For many people this becomes an obsession. People are taken over by fear of not being able to provide for themselves or their families. This fear can be paralysing. People therefore often allow themselves to be swallowed up by work. But Jesus says, in vv. 25—34 that this is not how it should be. God provides for the plants and animals in His creation. Surely, then, He will provide for us humans as well, whom He holds is much higher regard. v. 27: “Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”. I have seen with my own eyes how a stroke can take away a person's life without killing him. Strokes and heart attacks are becoming more and more commonplace in our society. Trust that God is you Father and will provide for you as such, even in hardships.

Thankfully, a trusting, one-to-one relationship with God is possible. It is made possible by the same person who first spoke of it: by Jesus, through His death. He suffered and died for our lack of faith and trust so that we can rightfully call God our loving Father.

But looking at this passage, one must realise that it does not promise wealth and abundance here on earth. It does not promise that you will never suffer or go hungry. Indeed, Jesus says in v. 34 that everyday will have troubles. But he does promise that you have a Father in heaven (v. 32) who loves you and will care for you until He calls you home. We must also not, however, be ignorant and sit around and wait for food to miraculously come to us. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul writes in chapter 3 that people should work and earn their food. Indeed, God created man for work and to be stewards of creation.

But why then suffering at all? I do not have the answer for this, but I do know that, as humans, we have a very limited perspective. Looking back on my own life, I realise how I have learned from past hardships. And I am thankful to have known God to carry me through those times.

But why disappointment at all? Again: our rewards do not lie on earth. Our lives as we know them are not nearly the apex of our existence: we are heading to something much better. But before we get there, we have important work to do here on earth for the kingdom of God: hardships often accompany hard work.

So let us think for a moment: how trusting are we? In the beginning I asked you how you would feel if you were to be betrayed by someone you trusted. But have you ever betrayed someone's confidence, someone's trust? Do you trust all of the people who trust in you? Do you trust God completely, all of the time? Perhaps, for example, as a small child, your faith was shook when you didn't get what you prayer for for Christmas. Perhaps, in your early to mid 20's, you impatiently seek from God guidance in what you dramatically label the most critical decisions of your life. Whenever we ask but do not receive on demand, whenever we call out and are initially left to listen to our own echoes, we start to wonder, we start to doubt, even if just a little.

So what can we do not to doubt? What can we do to attain ultimate trust in God? Once again, as Jesus has said, it is not within us to achieve that. We may not be able to fully trust God all of the time as we should, but we are capable of making Him our foundation and our strength. Next time you are disappointed or are impatient for an answer (which will eventually come) , confess to God and tell Him that you love Him and that, despite your sin, you will never forsake Him. That way you will be gathering your treasure in a place where it matters. Because, unlike us, when we betray God's trust in our faithfulness, God does not shun us, but forgives us, and gives us another chance.

## Critique

I had three weeks to prepare this talk, but I never found a angle that I was really happy with. That said, I am proud of this talk: when I finally sat down to write it, I was nearly able to write a hour plus sermon. Still, personally, it feels a bit choppy at places: probably because I know how much I moved various parts around.

Some points I were commended on:

- The illustrations were hard hitting and got people thinking.
- I worked systematically through the passage and had "good flow".
- The introduction and conclusion tied up nicely.
- Linking to 2 Thessalonians.

Suggestions for improvement:

- Some people struggled to see the connection between "treasures in heaven" and "trust in God" from the talk.
- Rewards ("treasures") are already mentioned in vv. 4 and 18. vv. 19—34 ties in with those verses and contrasts rewards attained from men (their praise and acknowledgement) with rewards attained from God.
- Picking up that v. 33 connects it all (see previous point).
- Perhaps I stretch the theme of trust a bit far in the talk. (I'll be the first to acknowledge this: when I decided to use trust as my main theme, I just grabbed it and ran with it.)
- I should not just have posed questions to my audience, but illustrated my points with relevant stories from my life.

All in all I feel good about the talk: I am happy with what I eventually produced and found the critique really helpful.

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