

3-16-25

## **Spiritual Weather Forecast**

### **Matthew 6: 19 - 23**

They call the Bering Sea the birthplace of storms. After living on an Island in the middle of the Bering Sea through four winters, 2003 – 2007, I can see why. While there, I became fascinated with the weather. I had never seen anything like it:

Rain that seemed to go up and down at the same time,

Wind that blew so hard against the house you'd mistake it for an earthquake.

Snowstorms so blinding that getting lost and falling into the bay became a real possibility!

After being there for a while I wanted to put some hard numbers behind my weather stories. For example, I wondered how fast was that gust of wind that practically blew the door off my van when I barely opened it?

Sadly, I'll never know. You see, I wanted to buy a weather station and get some readings for precipitation, temperature, and wind speed, but weather stations are not cheap; especially the kind that would be able to withstand winds approaching one-hundred miles per hour.

I think the measurement that I would have paid most attention to would have been the barometric reading. If I'm not mistaken, that's the reading that helps us determine if good weather or bad weather is approaching: If the barometric pressure rises, a high pressure is coming, and weather should improve. If the reading falls, weather conditions will deteriorate. I'm not a meteorologist, but I think that's generally how it works.

Did you know that we have a built-in spiritual barometer? We can look at its reading and get a fairly accurate measurement of our spiritual condition. Jesus spoke about it in Matthew 6:22 when He said ...

*“the eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.”*

When Jesus said this, I don't think he was referring to the physical appearance of our eyes, whether they are blood-shot from lack of sleep or sparkling because we're full of joy, though something certainly could be said for a bright and joyful countenance that should be the trademark of a Christian believer.

What I think Jesus meant is that our spiritual condition is, in large part, measured by what we set our sights on - what we pursue on a daily basis.

This interpretation makes sense in light of the three preceding verses where Matthew records Jesus' teaching: *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

In these verses, Jesus says two things about earthly treasures, doesn't He?

First, he says they're temporary- that's the *“moth and rust”* part.

Second, He says that earthly treasures are vulnerable- that's the *“thieves breaking in and stealing”* part.

The first car I remember my Dad and Mom owning was an early 1970's Ford Custom 500. As some of you may recall, the 70's were not good years for Ford cars. It seemed that as soon as you drove one off the lot, it began rusting out. I'll never forget the day my family went out to the garage to get into the car for a trip, and there, lying on the floor of the garage was the gas tank!

The brackets that had held it up had completely rusted straight through! This is a perfect picture of what it means to be both temporary and vulnerable. (I hate to think of what would have happened if we had been driving down the highway when the brackets finally gave way... God was certainly watching out for us!)

I think most Christians agree with Jesus' teaching recorded in Matthew 6 - at least on an intellectual level:

Yes, be more concerned with the permanent and eternal aspects of life, more so than the accumulation of worldly goods and wealth.

Invest more time and energy into important relationships than chasing the "almighty dollar."

Try to see the value of things from God's perspective rather than from our earthly human view.

Yet it seems to me that many of us, myself included, have a difficult time pulling ourselves away from the lure and siren song that beckons us to want more: we've bought into a false treasure map that points us to a false god, an idol if you will – and a surprising one too, though when we think about it for a moment, we shouldn't be too surprised.

In my early years as a Christian, I used to think that this mistaken treasure / false God / idol took the form of a brand new car, a bigger house, a higher paying job, or a Hollywood physique, but I was wrong.

These are simply waysides along the course of this misguided treasure hunt. And your waysides will be different than mine. Maybe yours is more solitude, more space, more notoriety, more letters behind your name, more security, more influence – you fill in the blank.

But when we finally get to the X that marks the spot at the end of our misguided treasure hunt, we will all find the same thing: a picture of ourselves!

We see ourselves! We are the idol! We feed it, we nourish it, and we serve it, and now it is looking back at us saying, I'm not satisfied; I want more!

Dear Christians, we must tear up and toss away this map that leads us to this dead end of simply serving ourselves.

Let us take up a map that leads us to the one true God and to eternal life. The wonderful thing about the map is that it is easy and plain to understand!

A few years ago – at least it seems like a few years ago - I was sitting in a barbers' chair getting my haircut, and the question came up: What do I do for a living?

Typically, I'm pretty cautious about bringing up religion while I'm getting my haircut -you never know how the barber might respond- and I like a good haircut - and my ears too.

But I took a deep breath and a leap of faith and told him I was a pastor of a church. Immediately, he went off about this one book he'd been reading called the Bible Code and how some "experts" had fed all the words of the Bible into a computer and, using every seventh letter, it supposedly revealed the date and time of Jesus' return to earth. And He went on and on about how fascinated he was with this book and the breaking of this code.

So, when I finally got to speak again, I asked him a simple question – not to be mean or burst his bubble of enthusiasm, but to legitimately know. My question went something like this:

If God was so set on communicating the time and date of his return, why didn't he tell us when he was on earth? Why would he hide it from us in the form of some secret code?"

You see, I'm under the understanding and conviction that God's message to us is neither cryptic nor confusing, but is plainly spelled out for us in His Word.

The Bible says He made us and loves us. He loves us so much that He has given us specific instructions that help us relate to Him and to our fellow human beings. In fact, he has not only given us the instructions, he even gives us the vehicle by which we are able carry out his commands. Namely, he gives us the gift of His Holy Spirit whom every believer receives at the moment we turn to God in faith.

The truth is that if we don't receive God's permanent and indestructible force from heaven – the Holy Spirit who wants to live in us, teach us, guide us, and regenerate us, our lives will remain vulnerable and temporary.

Vulnerable in the sense that God, as much as much as God wants to, He cannot be our refuge if we continue to push Him away. Temporary in the sense that God's offer of grace is not unending. We must choose to follow Him in this life, now before He makes his awesome and glorious return.

Faith in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is the true treasure map that leads to eternal life – and the wonderful thing about eternal life, is that it begins now. If we think eternal life doesn't start until heaven, we're already going down the wrong path that leads to our own destruction.

The road map to heavenly treasures and the blueprint for righteousness is found in Christ alone.

But let me, for a moment, share one important truth concerning our spiritual enemy: His most effective lies are those that closely mimic God's truth. Here's a prime example: The truth is that we humans are extremely valuable. We are so valuable that God did not even spare even his own Son to save us. God offered up His Son to die in our place so that we, through faith, might receive his forgiveness, his righteousness, and his eternal life. Isn't this the most wonderful and glorious truth?

But here's Satan's "rendition" of the truth: Each of us are extremely valuable. In fact, we are so valuable that God does not want us to be deprived of anything. He has given us everything the world has to offer. All we need to do is reach out and take it for ourselves. In doing so, we'll become like Him. Have you heard that lie before? It's the same one Satan used to deceive Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Here's the subtle but important difference: in God's truth, we receive God's gifts by faith. In doing so, we recognize them as God's gifts. In Satan's "version" – we don't receive God's gifts, we take them as if somehow we deserve them. In this way, we effectively nullify the grace of God – our only way to salvation.

It's so important for us to discern truth from lies. It's a matter of eternal life or death! But if we don't have good eyes, a good guiding lamp for our body and mind and soul, we won't be able to discern truth from a lie.

Jesus says this is a very serious and possibly terminal condition: *"If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

We need someone greater than the darkness to overcome it. Praise be to God for our Lord Jesus Christ whom John calls the Light of men! John says this about Jesus in John 1:4-5 and 9:

*“In Him was life, and that life was the light of men.*

*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.*

*The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.”*

Years ago, I was channel surfing on the radio – remember those old-fashioned devices? I happened across the radio show called “All Things Considered” on National Public Radio. You’ve probably heard of it. (I rarely listen to NPR for a number of reasons I can’t get into right now.)

But it just so happened that they were interviewing Tim Lahaye, co-author of the popular “Left Behind” series. Remember those books from the 90’s that were extremely popular among Christians who were wondering what things would be like on earth after Jesus came back for his church – aka. The rapture?

Anyway, I was excited to hear what he had to say, because I knew that a large portion of NPR’s audience were non-Christians. And I’m happy to report that he didn’t disappoint. He spelled out the Gospel clearly and concisely. He also related a story about how, in his travels, he happened to meet the Dalai Lama, a very pious and religious man, but certainly no Christian.

Tim Lahaye wanted to sit down with this highly regarded religious figure because he wanted to share Jesus. So, he invited Him to do so, but as it turned out, the two never did. The Dalai Lama’s security guards brushed him off, saying he was on a tight schedule and didn’t have time.

I don't know if the Dalai Lama politely declined or if the security guards even gave Him the message. But I do know this: We can't afford to make the same mistake. If we don't have time for Jesus in this life, He says that he will not have time for us in the next.

In Matthew 10:32-33 Jesus said, *"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge him before my Father in Heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in Heaven."*

Very direct and sobering words. No ambiguity here.

Are houses, cars, and bank accounts bad? No, they're gifts from God. The Bible says, *"every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights"* James 1:17.

We need food and shelter and a means to make financial transactions. This is the world God created us to live in, but the Bible also says, *"Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."*

100% of the things we have in our possession right now are temporary, earthly, and vulnerable, but God's Kingdom and His Righteousness remain eternal.

The Bottom Line: Don't short-circuit God's blueprint for Righteousness. If you honor and serve self and continually turn from God, vulnerability and the temporary will be the overarching theme of your life.

Love, honor, and serve God in this life. Then our treasure is already ours, kept in heaven for us where it will never perish, spoil or fade.

One Final Question: What are treasures in Heaven? Well, besides being with the Lord Himself, maker of heaven and earth, Paul makes it pretty clear what those other treasures will be when he writes to Thessalonian church:



*“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you? Indeed you are our glory and joy.”*

**1 Thessalonians 2:19-20**

Loving others, respecting others, and helping others find hope, forgiveness, and righteousness through faith in Christ – these are a portion of the Christian’s treasures. These are what we are to invest in.

May the Lord give us the wisdom and will to invest in each other for our neighbor’s sake and for God’s glory. Our eternal lives depend on it.  
Amen.