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Introduction

In the SMH a couple of years ago, Economic's editor Ross Gittins was talking about the fact that Australians are the *richest* they've ever been. That we, as a nation today, have a higher standard of living than any of our forebears. Its true; and he gave us some proof. You see, allowing for inflation, *Real incomes* have *doubled* since 1967; and *trebled* since 1950.

So if you're my age, you're living on *twice* what your parents lived on. And *three times* your grandparents. And yet we still, according to surveys... 62% of Australians say *we still* can't afford to buy everything *we need*. Because the problem is, according to Ross Gittins, we spend all our time figuring out new ways to spend our money.

You see the majority of us were comfortable back in the 1980s. Now we're 55% richer. 55% more comfortable. And complaining that we can't afford everything *we need*. We're spending *more money* on bigger houses. Which have almost doubled in *floor area* since 1955 from 115 square metres to 221. And we've got less people per house. He says a *third* of all households have *more than two cars*. He says, everything these days is *air conditioned*. He says more and more average Australians are choosing to pay for *private education*. He says we're paying for *entertainment systems* in our homes with wide screen TVs and *surround sound* that in the 80s people could only dream about. Now we *need them*.

Ross Gittins says, we're pouring all our extra income into stuff we don't really need that doesn't do us any good. And yet we think we're doing poorly. Because, he says, we Australians are hooked on the false promise of materialism - that the next dollar we spend will be the one that will finally makes us happy.

It's true isn't it. The average Australian thinks that money will make them happy. But that's not true of us Christians is it? We don't live in a bigger house than what we used to, do we? We don't have more cars, bigger TV screens, more expensive clothes, air conditioning, do we? We don't think that money will buy us happiness, do we?

For Jesus is saying we need to be different! We are trying to form a Christian counter culture. We want to be salt and light to our world. And part of that is that we don't just want to be like the religious, we saw that last week in how we pray, in how we give, in how we fast. And this week, we see we just don't want to be like the average Aussie in how we pile up our treasures, in what our attitude is to money or worry. For the Christian, the aim is to seek first God and his righteousness. That is at the heart of everything we do.

But how do we do that? How can we live our lives totally for God when there are so many distractions with work, and family and money and food and clothing? Well the next part of the Sermon on the Mount gives us four illustrations that will help us to tease out how we do it. It is all to do with your treasure, your eyes, your master and

your life. Lets see what Jesus means.

1. Treasure - earthly or heavenly? Verses 19-21

For Jesus starts off by making us think about where our treasure is. What are the things that we think are valuable? For when we have a choice we always try to do the most important thing don't we? So is the most important thing to you to make money for your family or to spend time with your family? Would you prefer to watch sport on the TV or to spend time with God in prayer? If you had the choice would you spend money on food or on a new set of clothes. You see everyday we make these sorts of decisions. And Jesus is reminding us that you will make these decisions based on what you value.

So if you want to live your life totally for God, we need to value things in heaven over things on the earth. For our clothes will grow out of fashion, our money will devalue, our homes will decay, our shares will be caught up in a stock market collapse and our reputation is easily tarnished. So these things don't last. Instead we must store up treasures in heaven, where moths and rust and inflation can not destroy.

Jesus is saying that the only gilt edged investment is in the Bank of heaven. For I will never take anything material into the next life, all I can do is send some things on.

Now I don't think that Jesus is condemning all wealth, any more than he is condemning all clothes. He is not prohibiting things, but the love of things. Trusting in things. Looking for our happiness primarily in things. Rather than looking for our happiness and our security in God. Rather than being more like Jesus.

C. Charles Allen, in his book *The Sermon on the Mount*, says "*According to our standards of success, Jesus was one of the failures of history. He disappointed His friends and followers. His family considered Him a hopeless dreamer. He was trained for a respectable trade but turned His back upon it. He never drew a salary, never saved any money, never even owned a house in which to live. He achieved none of the status symbols that we consider so important – a flashy new car, two television sets, an honorary degree, and so on.*"

And yet as Christians we are to be like Him. So what do you invest your time and money in? In your own needs or in your wants, in your family's needs or in their wants? In the poor and their needs? In the missionary and their needs? In the Church and its needs? For where you put your time and money shows God and your next door neighbour where your heart is. It shows them whether you are different. It shows them what is important in your life.

To live for God we must love heavenly treasure, the things of God more than earthly treasures, the things of the world. But Jesus says we also have to watch our eyes-

2. Eyes - good or bad?

So much of what we do in our lives is dependent upon our eyes. We need to see in order to run, jump, drive a car, cross the road, cook, sew, paint. When we get older, one of the worst things that can happen is for us to lose our sight, for then we lose our

independence. The eye affects our whole body, so it is important that the eye is good, or what is probably a better translation is, that we are one-eyed, or single minded.

Now we admire people who are single minded in sport don't we, who concentrate on nothing else but to be the best. So when Grant Hackett or Libby Trickett wins the gold medal we admire their dedication to being the best. We see lots of supporters who are one-eyed - they don't want anyone but their team to win. And we are to be single minded in the pursuit of pleasing God.

And to do that Jesus says we need to watch what we are looking at, because what's in our vision will affect our passion. So don't be consumed by consumerism. Don't just look and listen to what the advertisers on TV say what you desperately need. Keep your eyes on the prize in heaven. Keep your vision fixed on God. Come to Church, read your Bible, talk to Him in prayer. Take your sight off just the things of this world, direct your gaze on what is the most important thing in your life, the Lord.

Kim Reichelm is the "extreme skiing" world champion. You may have seen him on television skiing down the peak of a treacherous mountain that looks like certain death for anyone trying to go down it on snow shoes, let alone skis. But Reichelm loves that and he loves especially skiing through a grove of trees after a fresh, deep snow. It is extremely dangerous, and many skiers have been killed trying to do it. But there is a technique to it, "What you focus your eyes on becomes critical in the woods. Look at the spaces between the trees, the exits where you hope to be travelling." Reichelm, says, "The secret is not to stare at what you don't want to hit."

So what are you staring at? What are you looking at? One hour a week in Church will not be enough. A few minutes each day with God in a quiet time will not be enough. So how will you train your eyes, your heart, your will to look at not just those bigger houses, not just those wide screen TV's but the needs of the poor, the needs of the Church, the needs of the gospel?

We are different to everyone else. What we treasure is different, what we look at is different and whom we serve is different as well. Look at Jesus words. "*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.*" That's our third choice, between two masters God and money.

3. Master- Money or God.

You see so many people believe that the Christian life is a matter of belief, something of the mind. Or even a matter of doing, where you fix your gaze - but it is more than that, much more than that. It is a matter of being - who you are, and more importantly who do you serve?

For we all serve a master. We all have someone or something that controls our actions. But the Bible talks about the fact that if you are serving money, or pride, or family, or self then really you are serving the Devil. Because Satan's aim is to take your service away from God, and he really doesn't care who you serve, as long as you don't serve God. You see he doesn't really care if you go to Church, and yet never take the Bible seriously. He doesn't mind if you believe in God, as long as you don't

serve God.

And the biggest opposition to serving God today is the opposition from money. Do you know a couple of years ago a book came out called *The Day America Told the Truth*. It was by two guys, James Patterson and Peter Kin, and what they did was ask a large range of Americans what they would be willing to do in exchange for \$2 million. This is what they said

- a. (25%) Would abandon their entire family
- b. (23%) Would become prostitutes for a week or more
- c. (16%) Would give up their American citizenship
- d. (16%) Would leave their spouses
- e. (10%) Would withhold testimony and let a murderer go free
- f. (7%) Would kill a stranger
- g. (3%) Would put their children up for adoption

That's the power of money. It helps us to make decisions that we wouldn't normally make. It means we spend large amounts of time away from our families. It means we are willing to go without sleep, to have increased stress, spend hours in gridlock traffic, even live away from home, in order to get the money, that we think we need to live life.

But doesn't the poet put it well,
Money can buy a bed...but it cannot buy sleep.
Money can buy amusements but it cannot buy happiness.
Money can buy companions but it cannot buy friends.
Money can buy books but it cannot buy brains.
Money can buy a house but it cannot buy a home.
Money can buy medicine but it cannot buy health.
Money can buy flattery but it cannot buy respect.

But we as Christians wouldn't serve money in the place of God would we? We wouldn't put money before family or friends or Church or the Kingdom, would we?

John Ortberg pinpoints this in his article, *Taking Care of Busyness*. He says, "For most of us, the great danger is not that we will renounce our faith. It is that we will become so distracted and rushed and preoccupied that we will settle for a mediocre version of it. We will just skim our lives instead of actually living them." I think he is half right. Some will renounce their faith, but the rest of us are tempted to push our belief in God to the edges rather than keeping it in the middle.

We can't store our treasures on both earth and heaven - we need to make a choice. We can't fill our eyes with both good and bad, we have to make a choice. We can't serve both God and money, we have to make a choice. And lastly we have to make a choice between worry and trust.

4. Life - worry or trust?

Now there is plenty of things to worry about in today's world isn't there? Money, job, family, future, health, global warming, nuclear disaster. Did you know that the English word worry comes from an old German word meaning to strangle, or choke.

That is exactly what worry does; it is a kind of mental and emotional strangulation, which might cause more mental and physical afflictions than any other single cause. And worry might be the sin that Christians commit more frequently than any other.

But we should be different to everyone else when it comes to worry. Jesus says, don't worry, but trust. Don't worry about your life, what you eat and what you drink. Don't worry about clothes, don't even worry about tomorrow. You are not in control, God is. He clothes the flowers of the field, he feeds the bird and he is the one who has tomorrow in his hands. Trust Him. He made you, he loves you, he will look after you. Trust Him.

You are to be different to everyone else. Let them have their worry beads, their stress, their concerns. But you should seek God's kingdom, you should pursue his righteousness. You should leave your worries with him because you can't add a single hour to life through worry, you will only reduce it! So hand it over to Him. Place the things that worry you in his hands. Let Him be concerned with the things that he controls and you get on with the task of being different, being more like Jesus.

A widow who had successfully raised a very large family was being interviewed by a reporter. In addition to six children of her own, she had adopted 12 other youngsters, and through it all she had maintained stability and an air of confidence.

When asked the secret of her outstanding accomplishment, her answer to the newsman was quite surprising. She said, "I managed so well because I'm in a partnership!" "What do you mean?" he inquired. The woman replied, "Many years ago I said, 'Lord, I'll do the work and You do the worrying.' And I haven't had an anxious care since."

Now I'm not saying this is easy advice to follow. There are so many things that will cause us concern. And rightly so. As Jesus says each day will have enough troubles of its own. But a lot of things we worry about are tomorrow's concerns and they may or may not ever happen. And a lot of things we worry about we have no control over, so why not hand it over to God. Who does have control over it.

That will just leave a few things. And as we pray to God about these things. As we seek his help, his strength, his guidance, he will take many of those worries from us as well. Leaving us with what is manageable. And helping us to have enough energy to think about God's kingdom, what he is doing all around me, with my family, with my friends, with my Church. And with His righteousness, what he is doing with me, in the midst of my troubles. Helping me to grow in faith, in love, in hope, in Christ likeness.

How did the Poet put it?:

*"For every evil under the sun, There's either a cure or there is none.
If there be a cure, seek 'til ye find it, If there be none, then never mind it!"*

As Christians we are to be different from everyone else. For we are seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We will treasure God's rule over our life. We will cast our vision on Him and not on the latest consumer goods. We will serve him and not the demanding boss of money. And we will leave the worrying to Him and

we will trust Him whether life turns out to be fair or not.

In the fourth century, the Roman Emperor Julian the Apostate, failed in his efforts to suppress the Christian faith, largely because of the distinctive living he found among believers. He told his officials, "We ought to be ashamed. Not a beggar is found among the Jews, and those godless Galileans (that is the Christians) feed not only their own people but ours as well, whereas our people receive no assistance whatever from us.

But what if some world leader was to say today "we ought to be ashamed. Not a worrier is found among those fanatics who call themselves Christians. And when difficulties come they try to give comfort to some us when we worry, whereas our people just pop pills, or take tranquillisers or visit any counsellor that comes there way. They don't love money, they are not consumed with consumables. And yet they are happier than us." If they were to say that it would set us apart from everyone else and make the Christian faith attractive to all who would see it.

Let me end with a story, in the movie about Apollo 13 space ship, one of the astronauts is looking at the earth from space. As he stares at planet earth, which now seems so small, he lifts his thumb until the entire earth is blocked out. The earth, which seemed so large before, was now so small that he can no longer see it. What can he now see? Just the heavens.

Regularly we need to lift the finger of faith and place it over our fear, over our lives, over our treasures. And with those things now not on the forefront of our thinking we need to focus on heaven. On God. On Jesus. On his kingdom. On his righteousness. That will put everything in perspective, so that when we remove our finger again and look back at our lives, we will see everything in a different light, in God's light. And that will should make all the difference.