

Matthew 6:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

Analysis

Jesus commands a radical reorientation of values: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal' (Greek: μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, 'do not treasure up treasures upon the earth'). The verb θησαυρίζω means to store up or accumulate. Jesus identifies three threats to earthly wealth: moths (destroying clothing/fabric), rust (βρῶσις, literally 'eating,' possibly oxidation or vermin), and thieves. All earthly treasures are temporary and vulnerable. The command isn't against possessions per se but against accumulation as life's organizing principle. Security sought in material wealth is illusory.

Historical Context

In the ancient world, wealth consisted largely of grain stores, clothing, precious metals, and land. Moths destroying expensive garments was serious loss. Homes with mud-brick walls were vulnerable to thieves digging through (the Greek 'break through' literally means 'dig through'). Without modern banking or insurance, wealth preservation was precarious. Jesus' teaching challenged both poverty-stricken peasants dreaming of wealth and wealthy landowners hoarding it. His audience included both extremes.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does our consumer culture's emphasis on accumulation conflict with Jesus' command?
2. What are modern equivalents of 'moths, rust, and thieves' that threaten earthly treasures?
3. How can we use material resources without making them our treasure or source of security?

Interlinear Text

Μὴ	θησαυρίζετε	ὑμῖν	θησαυροὺς	ἐπὶ	τῆς	γῆς	ὅπου
not	Lay	for yourselves	treasures	upon	^{G3588}	earth	where
G3361	G2343	G5213	G2344	G1909		G1093	G3699
σῆς	καὶ	βρῶσις	ἀφανίζει	καὶ	ὅπου	κλέπται	
moth	and	rust	doth corrupt	and	where	thieves	
G4597	G2532	G1035	G853	G2532	G3699	G2812	
διορύσσουσιν	καὶ	κλέπτουσιν·					
break through	and	steal					
G1358	G2532	G2813					

Additional Cross-References

Hebrews 13:5 (Parallel theme): Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Luke 12:21 (Parallel theme): So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

Proverbs 16:16 (Parallel theme): How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!

Proverbs 11:4 (Parallel theme): Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.

1 Timothy 6:17 (Parallel theme): Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

Luke 18:22 (Parallel theme): Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.

Luke 12:33 (Parallel theme): Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

Zephaniah 1:18 (Parallel theme): Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.

Psalms 62:10 (Parallel theme): Trust not in oppression, and become not vain in robbery: if riches increase, set not your heart upon them.

Psalms 39:6 (Parallel theme): Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.