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Exegetical Question : θησαυρός may not be πλοῦτος. Re-interpreting μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (Matt 6,19) Exegetical Reflection in Honour of Prof. Dr. J. Kügler, a Treasure for African New Testament Science and Applied Biblical Studies

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## **16 Exegetical Question: *θησαυρός* may not be *πλοῦτος*. Re-interpreting *μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς* (Matt 6,19)**

Exegetical Reflection in Honour of Prof.  
Dr. J. Kügler, a Treasure for African New  
Testament Science and Applied Biblical  
Studies

### *Abstract*

This study intends to suggest an alternative reading of the concept “treasure”, which is found in Jesus’ command “not to treasure for yourselves treasure on earth” (Matt 6,19). For its literary section, the paper will employ selected steps of the exegetical method which include inter- and intratextual reading of the concept under study, found in the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, as well as its use within the religio-economic context of the Near East. This is here argued as paramount in coming up with an alternative understanding of treasuring within the context of the Sermon on the Mount. On the level of application, the study will utilise the Zimbabwean context as a case study, for the purposes of observing how the pericope is currently being interpreted by the proponents of involuntary material poverty, as well as the advocates of the Gospel of prosperity, two seemingly antagonising poles within Zimbabwean denominational Christianity. Whilst both camps appeal to biblical passages to justify their stance in relation to material wealth, Matt 6,19–21 included, the main question in this regard will be to determine whether the pericope under study fits in the discourse. The hypothesis is that when understood within the context of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus possibly inaugurated his new movement distinct from the one advocated by the Jewish temple, his use of the Old Testament concept “treasure” referred to temple wealth

more than it would fit in the discourse regarding individual accumulation or not accumulation of material wealth, technically referred to as *πλοῦτος* in the Synoptic Gospels.

**Keywords:** *Gospel, Matthew, Treasure, Accumulation of Wealth*

## 1. Introduction

Zimbabwe, like most countries in the Global South, has experienced an episode of extreme forms of conceptions of the Christian religion in relation to material wealth. The advent of the mission churches, especially the Catholic Church, witnessed the widespread proclamation of the gospel of involuntary poverty and detachment as a whole mark of conversion, with the vilification of material wealth, which was preached to be mundane and sometimes evil. The impossibility of converts to “serve both God and mammon” (Matt 6,24) was stressed, leaving them with no option but work for heavenly wealth. With the coming on board of charismatic Christianity, an antithesis of the dominant gospel of detachment seemed to have been one characteristic mark which resulted in the younger generation to “convert en masse” from mission churches into becoming full and active member of the latter, since they saw in them a fulfilment of their longing to fight and win against involuntary poverty. As this process continued, there seems to have developed yet another extreme, the over emphasis of the acquisition of personal, material wealth, even without taking care of how one acquires the same.

At the centre of these extremes are some biblical passages which are interpreted in a directly opposite way to support their respective worldviews, leaving a situation of at least two opposing poles running parallel, both claiming to be an authentic form of real Christianity. One such passage at the centre of the gospel of involuntary poverty and detachment is Matt 6,19–21. This pericope came to be dominantly interpreted as exhorting believers not to accumulate personal, material wealth here on earth, but rather work for heavenly and spiritual wealth, since it is in heaven that real wealth is preserved, given that heaven is the real destination that believers ought to aspire for as they shun the current passing world.

## 2. The meaning of θησαυρός in Matt 6,19 and its Implications for Zimbabwe

### 2.1 Exegetical Questions

Does the pericope of Matt 6,19–21 concern itself with castigating individual accumulation of μαμωνᾶς, or πλοῦτος (earthly riches) per se in the same sense as Matt 6,24 or it is concerned with something different? Secondly, if it does, is this individual accumulation of earthly riches the only way treasure (θησαυρός) can be understood in Scripture? Third, if there are other convincing senses in which θησαυρός may be rendered, what then will be the status of Matt 6,19–21 in the discourse pertaining to the acquisition and securing of individual earthly riches?

My inquiry is here to trace and investigate how θησαυρός (treasure) is used in Scripture, the context of the Near East, and history, still emphasising this material dimension, and thereby endeavouring an alternative interpretation. It is noteworthy that Matt 6,19–21 will be treated as a unit, which reads:

19 Μὴ θησαυρίζετε ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, ὅπου σὴς καὶ βρῶσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ὅπου κλέπται διορύσσουσιν καὶ κλέπτουσιν· 20 θησαυρίζετε δὲ ὑμῖν θησαυροὺς ἐν οὐρανῷ ὅπου οὔτε σὴς οὔτε βρῶσις ἀφανίζει καὶ ὅπου κλέπται οὐ διορύσσουσιν ἰούδὲ κλέπτουσιν· 21 ὅπου γὰρ ἔστιν ὁ θησαυρός ἱ σου, ἐκεῖ ἔσται καὶ ἡ καρδία ἱ σου (NA28).

19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (Matt 6,19–21, RSVCE).

As numerous scholars delved into studying at length various portions of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, fairly few have treated Matt 6,19–21 as an independent pericope. Several scholars treat it as an opening part of a longer section (Matt 6,19–34). For Davies & Allison this pericope does not answer the "how" of treasuring because it is already given by what comes before it; to be rewarded are those who do not practise piety in public but give alms and prays secretly (Davies & Allison, 1988, p. 625).

Some view it as a conclusion of what comes before it (Matt 6,1–18). Pennington thus: Matt 6,1 and 6,19–21 form an *inclusio* around 6,2–18. Hence for him, 6,19–21 must be viewed as a concluding part of what comes before it (Pennington, 2007, p. 114).

Regarding the message of this pericope, scholars seem to be unanimous that it discourages accumulation of material possessions and finding solace in them as the “be-all and end-all” of one’s life. This message is brought about most especially as these verses are viewed in the light of such pericopes as Matt 19,16–30 in which individual, material wealth accumulation is seen as a blockage for one to attain Heaven since it is earth centred. But is this everything that can be said about the pericope?

## 2.2 Exegetical Issues

The pericope at first glance seems to be unconnected with what comes before or after it; with Matt 6,18 concluding on the teaching of fasting in secret, and Matt 6,22 teaching about “the eye as a lamp for the body”. However, I subscribe to the above position by Pennington that Matt 6,19 agrees with Matt 6,1 with which they form an *inclusio*. All the same, I maintain that Matt 6,19–21 is an independent unit whose meaning can be deduced. Within the context of the Sermon on the Mount, the pericope of Matt 6,19–21 seems to fit as a hinge in Jesus’ inauguration of his movement as he pointed out what was detestable in the old, dominant temple religion. Thus, this pericope seems to be the only indirect reference to the temple economy which may be said to have been buttressed by the physical cleansing of the temple in Matt 21, and may be read side by side as will be shown below.

Literary devices found include repetitions such as “treasuring treasure”, and metaphors like rust, moth and thieves. Present in the pericope vividly, is the use of comparative language; not earth but heaven, put across in the form of the strong, prohibitive negative imperative, in which  $\mu\lambda\prime$  (never) is used with the present imperative  $\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\tau\epsilon$  and the affirmation  $\theta\eta\sigma\alpha\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\tau\epsilon$   $\delta\grave{\epsilon}$  which is antithetical (Smyth, 1984, p. 608).

### 2.2.1 The Concept of “treasure” Linked to the Temple Wealth in the Old Testament

In the Septuagint (LXX), one of the senses in which θησαυρός is used, is that in reference to “the material wealth of the house of the Lord” (τοὺς θησαυροὺς οἴκου κυρίου) (1 Kings 7,37; 2 Kings 24,13). In the Masoretic Text (MT), אֶצֶר is held to be the equivalence of the LXX θησαυρός. Its contextual meanings range from threshing floor, “riches of the house of the king” (אֶצֶר בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ), “riches of the house of the Lord” (אֶצֶר בֵּית יְהוָה) and “treasury” (בַּיִת הָאֶצֶר) in 1 Kings 14,26; 2 Chron 36,18; 1 Kings 7,51–52 and 2 Chron 9,12 respectively.

The term is also used cosmically to refer to heaven as a treasure house (Deut 28,12; 32,34). Taking cognisance that θησαυρος can mean both treasure and treasury and refers to individual and communal material wealth as found in different contexts in Scripture; my concentration in proposing an alternative interpretation of the pericope of Matt 6,19–21 will be on θησαυρός as communal treasuring. The question regards what this institutional wealth or treasure was, how it was accumulated and the ideology that might have supported the accumulation, and finally, who benefited from it? This might be suggesting a reading of Matt 6,19–21 from a contextual point of view regarding the economic life in Israel as a community, following the suggestion of Eubank, who seems to have done justice to this topic by pointing out especially the economic language that Matthew uses in this pericope and elsewhere (Eubank, 2014, pp. 77–91).

According to Marty in addition to tithes of agricultural produce and animals, Israelites paid a shekel tax to support the Jerusalem temple economy (Marty, 2006, p. 108). Temple wealth thus consisted of taxes, tithes, offerings, contributions, donations and treasures that came from Jews in various circumstances (Exod 30,13). These treasures were in the form of gold, silver, grain, wine, oil, wood and they sustained the temple economy. Gold and silver are thought to have been donated and deposited the most.

As a result, the Jerusalem Temple became an entity, because temple treasuries and the treasures made it a kind of a national depository that even required security and a running administration. Wright notes that temples functioned as banks of antiquity, and to extend the metaphor, the temple storehouses were bank vaults (Wright, 1990, pp. 69–81). If comparative studies are anything to go by, then evidence of the temple as an

alternative for people to store their personal treasures can be found especially from Mesopotamia and Greece. Marty states that despite risks, persons in the community deposited their precious commodities in the temple store rooms in confidence that 1) the deity would protect the treasured items, and 2) the excellent temple administrative staff would keep meticulous records (cf. Marty, 2006, p. 143). Initially, the temple labelled, sealed and stored items with intentions of returning them to their owners exactly as deposited.

This might explain the reason why temples were targets when foreign powers struck, for instance Judah; Joash seized all the gold and silver that was in the temple (2 Chron 25,24); the Chaldeans vandalised and burnt the Jerusalem Temple, and through them, God brought the “treasures of the house of the Lord”, among other things, to Babylon. Likewise, “Shishak king of Egypt took away the treasures of the House of the Lord and the treasures of the king’s house” (1 Kings 14,26).

Marty quotes Ezra 1,9–11’s inventory of the Jewish temple which was handed to Mithredath the treasurer by Cyrus king of Persia which had 5 400 gold and silver vessels and Ezra 2,13–14 which shows a bigger quantity, 5 469 vessels (cf. Marty, 2006, p. 44). Around 70 AD, the Romans are said to have destroyed the temple and again carried away the treasures of the temple according to Josephus. These plunders, which happened in different epochs, show that the temple appears to have had a flourishing depository in which treasure was put and kept, and this came to be termed the “treasury of the House of the Lord.” Kingsley brings to light the findings of 15 years of archaeology that there were three levels of storerooms around the temple’s three sides, each story with approximately thirty chambers (Kingsley, 2007). He estimates about 50 tons of gold as having been the treasure of Herod’s temple which fell in the hands of the Romans under Vespasian. Thus, *θησαυρός* appears in a material sense, and most importantly, linked to the temple riches. However, historical Books of the Old Testament seem to only tell us that there were treasures in the temple, but not much is said on the “how” this treasure was treasured.

Hauck contends that this idea of “payment to God” was distinctively extended in later Judaism (Hauck, 1965, p. 136). The good works of the righteous, especially his almsgiving, are regarded as his *θησαυρός* stored for eternal life. A hint from Deut 14,28 and Mal 3,10 which command “the

payment to the House of the Lord of a full tithe”, may point to the fact that tithes sustained this treasury and as Malachi expressed, bringing a full tithe is giving to God and it will result in him blessing the people abundantly here on earth.

These and similar theological conceptions, seem to have worked as ideologies that mobilised anyone rich or poor, to treasure treasures for themselves and for the poor in the temple, actively awaiting divine blessing. This theological justification might have emphasised on the compulsory storing of treasure in the temple under oath, as well as contribution towards the temple arm of charity, as shown by sections in Deuterocanonical texts of the late first millennium which support the role of the temple treasury as storing aid “for the widows and orphans” (2 Macc 3,6.10–11; 4 Macc 4,3.7).

It appears that Jewish authorities campaigned hard in discouraging the populace to pursue other forms of treasuring, for example, depositing with a private individual as reflected in Tobit 4,20; 5,2–3; 9,5; in preference for the temple treasury. Citations from the Psalms especially “they feast on the abundance of your house” (Ps 36,8–9); “he fills you with finest wheat” (Ps 147,14); “and I will abundantly bless its provisions; I will satisfy its poor with bread” (Ps 132,13–15) support the position of God who satisfies his people with good things and the role of the temple as that of catering for the needs of the disadvantaged.

### 2.2.2 Treasure in the NT

Some NT writers seem to have applied the OT concept of *θησαυρός* as individual, material wealth as found in Luke 12,33–34; Mark 10,21; 1 Tim 6,17–19; James 5,1–3, and not having direct allusion to the temple as above. Their exhortation thrust was on detachment; those who renounce earthly riches invest for the future and they will only be given their reward at the coming of the Son of Man. Mark and Luke claim the possibility of a double enjoyment of this investment or treasure; both in this present life and the life to come. According to Mark, those who renounce their possessions will receive, “a hundred times now, in the present time and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10,30). Luke, too, in 18,29–30, has this aspect of double recompense as shown in the words *ἐν τῷ καιρῷ τούτῳ* “in this age” and *καὶ ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τῷ ἐρχομένῳ ζῶνι αἰῶνιον* “and in the age to



come eternal life”. “In his Gospel, Matthew heightens the contrast between earthly poverty and the riches of the coming age.” (Eubank, 2014, p. 87).

## 2.3 Treasure and “treasuring” in Matthew

In Matt 6,19–21, Jesus might have also been condemning the concept of *θησαυρός* in relation to temple treasuring still in practice, which had become corrupt. The common fund, purportedly meant to cater for the orphan, widow and alien; and temple taxes and donations meant to support the cult, might have benefited the authorities. Surprisingly, Jesus does not mention the temple directly, in the whole Sermon where he might be expected to do so at length, since he is mentioning issues to do with righteousness (except in Matt 5,27 where there is mention of bringing an offering to the altar).

### 2.3.1 Interpretation

My hypothesis is that in these few words, Jesus seems to have prohibited the Jewish normalised, communal form of treasuring up treasure in the temple treasury. This hypothesis builds on the syntax used to communicate a strong, negative prohibition in a combination of *μὴ* and *δὲ* plus a present plural imperative, which makes the issue appear serious and all embracing. This might have been a revolutionary and provocative swipe against the temple cult authorities, together with the dominant ideology that supported the treasuring in the temple. His physical cleansing of the temple later in Matt 21,12–13 in which he lamented that the temple had been turned into “a den of robbers” instead of being “a House of prayer”, might be a follow up on this.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The orientation by the authors after the cleansing of the temple is different in Matthew and John’s accounts. In Matthew Jesus laments precisely, what authorities had turned the temple into “a den of robbers”, quoting Jer 7,11. Maybe this may point to the corruption in temple trade dealings and treasuring in the temple in particular, which possibly swindled the poor while pretending to be God instituted. In John, the emphasis is on Jesus who is consumed by the zeal for God’s house, quoting Ps 69,9, which may point to something different from Matthew’s (Matt 21,12–13 and John 2,13–17).

It might be that in the verses of this pericope, he tactically referred to this temple practice without mentioning it directly since doing so was extra sensitive and posed as a red line in his confrontation with the authorities who feasted from the same. In this sense then, “rust and moth” may refer to corrupt human beings, (possibly the Jewish aristocracy which included priests and kings), who appropriated for themselves what was supposedly offered to God; and “thieves” may refer to foreign powers, who plundered the temple first anytime they invaded Jerusalem.

Rust and moths are found in continuous contact with the things they feed on and their effect of destruction is slow but sure. This may then point to the corruption of temple authorities who controlled the temple cult and ultimately the temple economy. The digging through of the thieves, might be lamenting the occasional temple plunderers, Egyptians, Babylonians in the past, and contemporary to Jesus; the Romans who are recorded especially by Josephus, to have had indirect influence of the temple cult, to the extent of imposing client kings and chief priests from the aristocracy like Caiphas and religious leaders like Annas the Elder, ultimately robbing the temple riches.

Thus, it might be possible that Jesus used figurative language as he castigated the corruption within the temple economy of his time, where internal functionaries as well as external invaders arguable shared the spoil though in different ways, as they looted the temple storehouses. This is demonstrated by the characteristics of the elements that Jesus figuratively chose in putting his message across to his hearers, where σῆς (rust) and βρῶσις (moth) are said to consume (ἀφανίζω) and on the other hand, κλέπται (thieves) διορύσσω (dig through), all for the purposes of looting the temple treasury.

In order to evade the likely rampant corruption, Jesus appears to be saying that generosity to the poor must be done directly, secretly (Matt 6,1–4), and this is equivalent to treasuring in Heaven. People must by-pass the temple treasury arrangement, which is but treasuring on earth, for in it are rust and moth. Bauernfeind notes that the LXX apart from other senses, also uses moth figuratively in reference to human, feminine malice as in Sirach 42,13, and transitoriness as in Job 27 (Bauernfeind, 1971, pp. 275–278). I suggest that Jesus in Matt 6,19f; Lk 12, 33 is not so much demanding a resolute turning aside from all perishable treasures, but his

thrust might be on the agents of destruction which are difficult to notice though their after-destructive effects are severe.

Jesus was not addressing a group of rich young-men like the one in Matt 19,16–30 in a “business seminar” of some sort, but *οἱ ὄχλοι*, possibly made up of the poor, foreigners and rich alike; yet this message was meant for them all. If this message was addressing a practical phenomenon in practice, in which both the poor and rich compulsorily participated, then the temple cult comes to mind first. This might be warning them to stop even believing that treasuring their treasures in the temple was synonymous to treasuring with God in Heaven; but something else, namely, reaching out to the poor directly and performing acts of righteousness through alms-giving.

In fact, the Gospel of Matthew is strong on the aspect of individual, direct touch of a needy person by a believer, minus the temple treasury channel. This teaching is found, too, on the lips of Jesus to the rich young man, to whom he exhorted to “go and sell his earthly riches, give alms to the poor and so have treasure in heaven” (Matt 19,16–30). Even the final judgement is said to be based on whether this direct, hands-on generosity towards the disadvantaged was directly put in practice (Matt 25,31–46).

### 2.3.2 Implications for Zimbabwe

If the above hypothesis, which sought to liberate treasure which is understood by most interpreters as *πλοῦτος*, is anything to go by, then the pericope of Matt 6,19 may be more useful in the evaluation of denominational leaders who prey on the tithes and offerings of unsuspecting believers, as “they eat on behalf of God”. It is in the public domain that the luxurious lives that men and women of God lead in Zimbabwe, to the extent of owning private helicopters, are sustained by the offerings of congregants who are either convinced that they are treasuring in heaven, or seeding as they wait for their turn to harvest. Some of these religious leaders seem to be in partnership with influential politicians, as may be witnessed by their evasion of prosecution when their victims cry for justice.

To a greater extent therefore, the employment of this pericope in the discourse on whether a believer may acquire mundane wealth or follow the route of involuntary poverty may not be in line with the sense that has been argued for above. Seemingly, the message this time concerns the

plunderers of the treasure, both direct and indirect ones like rust and thieves, following the metaphors used in the pericope. It may therefore be a wakeup call to contemporary believers to evaluate the why of their tithing, and to be proactive in assisting the needy of their communities since the contemporary church functionaries apparently think of themselves first before the widow and the orphan. This therefore renders deficient the concept of keeping wealth on earth which religious leaders of this category propagate as the one discouraged by the passage and not necessarily its acquisition. How this enrichment of individual religious leaders is synonymous to gathering in heaven, whilst fulfilling the beatitude of inheriting the world with its milk and honey, remains elusive. Even the accompanying rhetoric that Jesus suffered for once on the cross in order for us to enjoy not only spiritual salvation, but the goodies of the present world, narrows the circle of the ones enjoying the benefits of the said resurrection as victory over poverty and suffering. More so, turning to the other extreme position which engages Matt 6,19 to instruct involuntary poverty, there might be need to revisit this understanding by first suggesting the above argued sense of treasure, as well as suggest a positive view of materiality. Upholding the teaching of the ungodliness of material wealth seems to have romanticised poverty by indirectly encouraging reluctance and lack of aggressive initiatives in fighting against material poverty, in favour of handouts. The ramifications of this seemingly Platonic understanding of the pericope which vilifies materiality while embracing the metaphysical, seem to persist to the effect that most members of especially mainline churches still embrace un-vowed poverty as heavenly, leaving them as a major constituent of that section of the population that arguably fails to adapt in the ever changing capitalistic world as they fail to put even food on their table. A positive view of physical wealth, coupled by a well-balanced ethic of acquisition, may need to be retaught so as to build a halfway building between two extremes; namely, advocacy of involuntary poverty and acquisition of riches without taking care of the how of acquiring.

Unintentional poverty is here distinguished from the intentional vow of poverty which some religious and priests in the Catholic Church take voluntarily as one of their Evangelical Counsels, alongside obedience and chastity.

### 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this work argues for the need to differentiate between at least two senses of wealth found in the New Testament; namely, treasures, mammon and riches. It went on to evaluate how two antagonistic views within Christian traditions have arrived created perceptions amongst their congregants regarding worldly riches through their interpretations of treasuring treasure in heaven as found in Matt 6,19.

Regarding the first task, I argued that individual material possessions or wealth, which is referred to as *πλοῦτος* in such New Testament, passages as Matt 13,22, Luke 16,11 and 1 Tim 6,17, or *μαμωνᾶς* in Matt 6,24, may to a larger extent be said to be distinct from the “riches of the house of the Lord” which are referred to as *θησαυρούς* in Matt 6,19.

While *θησαυρός* is generally used in reference to individual, material wealth, that could be invested elsewhere, it is also found especially in the historical books of the Old Testament, to refer to the material wealth of the temple treasury that included gold, silver, offerings, tithes and taxes that people deposited either to retrieve it later or to contribute to a fund that catered for the poor. Very few scholarly materials exploring institutional treasuring in the Jerusalem Temple exist, though comparative studies show that temples in the Ancient Near East had an economic function apart from a religious one, and sometimes this economic function was given a religious icing. Scholars have suggested that this wealth was huge, and it was also used to fund temple functionaries and the temple economy.

Understanding *θησαυρός* in the context of the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus inaugurated the new whilst castigating the abuses of the old, it may be considered likely that in Matt 6,19, he was in dialogue with the temple treasure and treasury which according to the context of the first century, had been infested by internal corruption and external technical plunder. It is this contextual reading that I suggest as crucial in a contemporary reading of the pericope within the Zimbabwean context, where focus seems to have confused *θησαυρός* for *πλοῦτος* with the resultant interpretations creating two extremes; advocacy for involuntary poverty as a

gateway to heaven, as preached by missionaries on one hand, and the antagonism of such an understanding by proponents of the gospel of prosperity on the other hand.

Whilst the inclination towards the gospel of prosperity by new age mega churches has been rebutted by most commentators, little attention seems to have been paid to the reason why such a Gospel appealed especially to the younger generations vis a vis the ever changing capitalistic economy which emphasises on competition, and acquisition, akin to “the survival of the fittest” principle. Though the reasons may be many, this analysis has argued that the treatment of *θησαυρός* in mainline churches left no space to appreciate and celebrate the created material order, as humanity’s domain which may be accumulated and used diligently. The Platonic influence which viewed the extra material (world of forms) as the real, and the material as corrupted, resulted in the lack of encouragement especially to the younger generation to accumulate wealth responsibly. This resulted in the promotion of the other extreme in the interpretation of the pericope, which sanctioned the embrace of involuntary detachment to material, personal wealth as heavenly.

My suggestion is therefore that in the pericope of Matt 6,19–21, Jesus commanded his followers not to store treasure anymore in the temple, because doing so, they risk losing their hard won wealth to corrupt individuals (rust and moth), and plunderers (thieves) who would dig through and steal. Rather, they had to treasure their treasures with God by helping the needy cases directly, without the intermediary role of the temple which he alluded to without directly mentioning. Therefore, Jesus might have likely used *θησαυρίζω* in the same sense that Proverbs used *δανείζω* (Prov 19,17); that is, treasuring as in lending to God through the poor, and this lending will be repaid; thus *ἀνταποδιδῶμι* (Prov 19,17).

Lending to God through the poor as a theme is found in many occasions in Matthew where Jesus exhorts the individual to be directly proactive, and personal, as in Matt 25,34–46 in which even the final judgement will be based on this direct involvement in acts of righteousness. This went against the ideology of giving to the temple as giving to God in Deuteronomy, some Prophets like Malachi and the Psalms.

If this is anything to go by, then Jesus’ new teaching attacked the very core of survival for the elite, who benefited much from the treasury given the

thousands of pilgrims who frequented the temple during major feasts, plus the many offerings that were obligatory on the populace. I would propose that this teaching in the context of the Sermon on the Mount is possibly an “ideological cleansing of the temple”, in which Jesus did not target this time the recipients of the taxes and treasures, but the payers and contributors. In the physical cleansing recorded in Matt 22,12–13, he might be said to have targeted the recipients, possibly temple functionaries and religious authorities, an event which Matthew places in the Passion Week, maybe to emphasise its treasonous nature, and so would merit Jesus' death. One of the accusations levelled against him during his trial was his attack on the temple institution.

Considering “the crowds” (οἱ ὄχλοι) who were his audience as constituted of Israelites and non-Israelites who also had temples in which as demonstrated above, treasures were kept, the effect of Jesus' words were far reaching in affecting even the deposits of those temples had people put Jesus' words in action.

Finally, considering the two extreme positions in Zimbabwean Christianity regarding a believer's supposed relation with material accumulation, which as already said, is best rendered by a contextual understanding of *πλοῦτος* more than *θησαυρός*, it can be said that the pericope of Matt 6,19–21 may be utilised in a quest for a moderate position in which the total vilification of wealth which encourages involuntary poverty and dependence on donor funding, as well as the accumulation of excessive materiality even without the emphasis on the “how” of acquiring, may need to be challenged. As argued above, this pericope may need to be read in relation to other pericopes like Matt 25,46ff in which alms giving directly to the poor, is considered more of treasuring with God which will be recompensed.

This will therefore encourage a positive look on material wealth, as well as encouraging Christian morality during and after this acquisition. Encouraging involuntary detachment then waiting for handouts from donor organisations in the name of Matt 6,19–21, may need to be repealed in the same way that excessive accrue-ment of material wealth regardless of the “how” as well as the end of the same may need to be evaluated. This maybe in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim at

fighting extreme poverty, whereby the mindset is addressed and the constituency that grovels in involuntary poverty come to be empowered to be self-reliant as they move out of their conditions to a better pedestal with the same Word of God, but this time contextually interpreted, as their beacon of enlightenment.

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