

The Gospel of Matthew

S.O.T.M.: WHERE IS YOUR HEART? (6:19-34)

When studying a passage it is necessary to consider the surrounding passages. You've heard the expression about missing the forest because of being focused on a tree, right? It applies to the Bible too. When we step back, we often find a complete thought process that brings life to the specific text we are studying.

In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus develops a thorough argument against spiritual idolatry that is larger than any one verse. If we don't step back and consider this larger concept as a whole, I feel we will miss the opportunity to marvel at Christ's wisdom and receive vital, heart-rending instruction. Read Matthew 6:19-34 and identify the common thread, the overarching theme of the passage. What evil is Jesus confronting?

In the KJV, Jesus says, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Mammon is a transliteration of a Greek word (mammonas) that means wealth. Jesus is confronting materialism or more generally idolatry.

Take a moment and expand upon the meaning of this evil. How do we see this manifested in the Old Testament? Read Joshua 24:15 and 1 Kings 18:21.

Materialism is worshipping God's creation and the blessings of the created world more than the Creator Himself. We see this manifested as idolatry in the Old Testament. They worshipped the false gods because they felt it helped them achieve a desired end, prosperity or blessing of their desires.

These verses in Matthew are ideologically similar parts of the Book of Romans. We can almost hear the echo of Jesus in the words of Paul. Read Romans 1:18-25 and 6:16-22 and discuss the similarities.

There are several points of similarity in these passages. In Romans 1:21-22 we see that when we worship idols, our heart is darkened and we become fools. In Romans 1:25 we see that ultimately, idolatry stems from worshipping the creature (creation) more than the Creator. In Romans 6:16-20 we see that we can't have two masters; there can only be one. In Romans 6:21-22 we see that the treasures of the earth are fleeting and those of heaven are eternal.

In these few verses in Matthew, Jesus single-handedly disarms any argument for making materialism our focus. Read the four sections of Matthew 6:19-34 as identified below and complete the statements.

- Idolatry will **take** your **heart** (v19-21)
- Idolatry will **darken** your heart (v22-23)
- Idolatry will demand your **undivided** worship (v24)
- Idolatry will **lie** to you and make you think you must seek it to **survive** (v25-34)

These statements are sobering. How broadly does Jesus apply the concepts of idolatry?

The scary thing is that about anything can become a god to us, even those things that are right, pure, and necessary. It isn't just money, cars, and houses; it includes the essential things money can buy such as food, drink, and clothing. They can become our gods and steal our thoughts and energies that should otherwise be devoted the Lord.

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What is material and wealth? Is it inherently evil? Is it an end or a means? Are the things the Lord entrusts us with for our glory or for His glory? These are important questions we will wrestle with as we study these verses in more depth. Let me conclude the introduction to this lesson with a quote from a song sung by one of my favorite groups, Caedmon's Call. I hope you will meditate on these words.

"You created nothing that gives me more pleasure than you; and you won't give me something that gives me more pleasure than you." – Josh Moore, from "You Created"

Find your Treasure, Find your Heart (6:19-21)

Time and resources are finite. We only have so much in this lifetime to invest. How will you invest what God provides to you? Those who are saved have access to eternal storehouses that far exceed the return and security of earthly banks. Let's begin our study of this passage by defining our key terms.

Lay up (thesaurizo) – **amass or reserve. This is not about having what is necessary or immediately purposeful; this is about amassing large stores beyond need or purpose.**

Treasures (thesauros) – **deposit, wealth.**

You will notice that both words share the same Greek root. This is where we derive the word, thesaurus, meaning a treasury of words. In this passage, Jesus is saying, "do not treasure up treasures."

A bit of historical explanation will clarify why Jesus chose to mention moth and rust as two enemies of earthly wealth.

CONCERNING MOTH AND RUST

In ancient times, wealth was frequently measured in part by clothing. Compared to our day of mass-produced clothes, garments represented a considerable investment. Rich people sometimes had golden threads woven into their clothing, both to display and to store their wealth. But the best clothes were made of wool, which the moth loves to eat; and even the richest person had difficulty protecting their clothes from the insects.

Wealth was also often held in grain, as we see from the parable of the rich farmer who said, "I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods." (Luke 12:18).

Brōsis (rust) literally means, "an eating," and is translated with that meaning everywhere in the New Testament but here... It seems best to take the same meaning here, in reference to grain that is eaten by rats, mice, worms, and insects."

The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 1-7, p. 411

Thieves, of course, are still common in our day and we see this type of greed manifested in all levels of society. How many country songs have been written about friends that show up when you have money and leave when you don't?

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Now that we have an understanding of the words, consider the audience Jesus was speaking to. Was there a problem with greed and covetousness among Jews in the New Testament era? Read Mark 7:9-13 and Luke 16:13-14. *The Pharisees, who were one of the major religious influences of the day had a problem with covetousness. Their love of money prompted them to withhold help from their own family when there was need.*

How do we define the evil of which Jesus is speaking? Is it sin to have a bank account? To understand what is meant by laying up treasures on earth, read Proverbs 6:6-8, Luke 12:15-21, and 1 John 3:17-18. *The man in Luke 12 had more than he needed or had purposed to use. He even built larger barns to store his grain and finally arrived at a point where he just stopped working and decided to take it easy. This sounds a lot like the American concept of retirement. There is a distinction between being prepared for when we cannot work and wanting to avoid work. The ant gathered in the summer because it could not gather in the winter. The ant didn't hoard in one summer in order to take the next few summers off. Laying up treasure on earth is the amassing of wealth (or material objects) for the sake of having them, without considering how best those resources (or the resources put into obtaining the material resources) should be used. This leads to withholding resources from their proper use.*

Which comes first, the treasure or the heart? Read Matthew 12:34 and Luke 6:45. *The heart comes first. It must be righted by God and then our actions will fall into place.*

Read 1 Timothy 6:6-11 and answer the following questions.

What is the limitation of earthly wealth?

It is only earthly. It will last only as long as this earth lasts and it will only benefit us during our lifespan. It does not follow us into the next life.

If you are poor, are you exempt from this passage? Why or why not?

Those that "will be rich" are the focal point. It is that desire for purposeless wealth or material goods that is condemned here. This could be the poor person in debt up to their eyeballs addicted to the Home Shopping Network!

What are the disadvantages of seeking to amass earthly wealth?

It will wrap you up in all sorts of sinful desires which will only bring more grief to your life. It will open the door to all manner of evil in your life.

Do you have treasures on earth? For what are you willing to sin, in order to gain or keep it? Remember that the instruction of Jesus is emphatic. Wherever your treasure is, you will find your heart. This is a wonderful tool God has made available to us that will help us discern where our heart truly is.

Read Luke 16:9. How can earthly wealth be most profitably utilized?

When we use them to further the work of God's kingdom, we are helping others to come to know Him and that treasure (saved souls) are eternal rewards that wait to welcome us in glory.

Spiritually Cross-Eyed (6:22-23)

No matter how keen your other senses are, they can never completely compensate for the lack of sight. Imagine living without color, the ability to read, clear perception of motion, the awe of God's majestic creation, the beauty of skilful artwork, and visual cues in communication. Many of us take these things for granted. Losing our physical vision would be a devastating blow. But what about our spiritual sight? Do we value it as highly? In this passage Jesus warns about one of the great dangers of idolatry: spiritual blindness.

We must first read this passage in context. Jesus just taught us that where our treasure is, we will find our heart too (verses 19-21). Our next verses will speak about our inability to serve two masters (verse 24). The broad application of the surrounding passages is idolatry, a.k.a. putting anything before God. Specifically, Jesus confronts the evil of materialism.

The obvious contrast in verses 22 and 23 is good and bad eyesight. There is a bit more insight to glean if we dig deeper. In the King James Version, we read that a "single" eye will allow our body to be full of light. Other literal versions translate "single" as "clear" or "good". The Greek word for single means, "without folds", like a piece of cloth that is unfolded. The picture is that of a set of eyes that are healthy and focused properly, singularly if you will. The King James translation appears to fit the flow of the text better, when we consider that Jesus is warning us to keep our focus on Him and not divide it between Him and the wealth of this world (see similar passages in Acts 2:46 and Ephesians 6:5). Otherwise, we end up spiritually cross-eyed and cannot see anything with clarity.

What results from a singular focus on the Lord? Read Proverbs 4:20-27, Isaiah 42:16, and Luke 11:34-36. **Our whole body will be full of light. By focusing on the Lord, He will illuminate our hearts and minds to truth, especially in alignment with our needs. He will show us truth about ourselves, His Word, the situations we face, how to help others, even the world in general.**

The reciprocal of a single eye is an "evil" eye. Based on what we have already discussed, we can define this as being spiritually cross-eyed (trying to focus on the material and on the Lord) or solely being focused on this world. It is impossible for me to sufficiently emphasize the grave danger of spiritual blindness. The subject is addressed throughout scripture. Read the following passages and summarize the important teachings. What perception do we lose when our focus is not singularly upon the Lord?

- James 1:8 – **Being spiritually cross-eyed creates instability across the spectrum of our life. It doesn't just affect us on Sunday, but every day of the week.**
- Matthew 20:10-16 – **When our eyes are evil, we fail to appreciate the blessings of God and give Him thanksgiving. We also fail to rejoice in grace and mercy. We become self-centered.**

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- 1 Corinthians 2:14 – We cannot perceive or appreciate the things of the Lord when we are in the flesh. They are only received as we walk in the Spirit.
- Ephesians 4:17-20 – By walking in the flesh, we lose our spiritual perception, alienate ourselves from God, and fall into a downward spiral of sin.
- Revelation 3:17-18 – We can become so blind that we no longer have a true assessment of ourselves. The church at Laodicea is a prime example of a congregation that was materially blessed and allowed the blessing to become the focus. They thought they were doing great and didn't perceive reality.

To touch upon the subject of Jesus' focus (materialism), let me say that the way we look at and use our material resources provides significant insight into our spiritual wellbeing. Are they an end in themselves or a means to glorify God? To sum up this teaching, read Psalm 135:15-18 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. What is the significance of our spiritual vision? Essentially, you will reach the destination upon which you fix your gaze. **You will become like the object of your worship and attention.**

The Danger of Divided Devotion (6:24)

A maxim is an established principle or proposition generally received or admitted as true. Here Jesus provides a maxim of worship, at least as it applies to true worship.

The Scriptures are replete with calls to single-hearted devotion to God. Harkening back to Genesis, we find that Cain's offering was unacceptable because his devotion was divided, while Abel's offering was accepted because he was singly focused on pleasing the Lord. Joshua and Elijah both challenged Israel to choose who they would serve rather than failing to worship God through divided devotion. When tempted by Satan to worship him in exchange for all the kingdoms of the world, Jesus replied, "Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matthew 4:10).

What is the spiritual result of divided devotion? Read Luke 8:14, John 15:4-5, 9-10; 14:15, and Matthew 12:30. **We become spiritually unfruitful. Spiritual fruit is borne as a result of loving Christ by obedience to Him. Not only do we become unfruitful, we ultimately work against the cause of Christ by being fruitless when we should be fruitful.**

Let's define four key terms in the passage. We previously defined the word, "mammon" as wealth or materialism.

Hate – *miseo* – detest or at least love less

Love – *agapeo* – love feast, biblical love

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Hold to – *antexomai* – adhere to, support, line up with

Despise – *kataphroneo* – to think against, disesteem

Two contrasts are set forth in this passage. I don't think they are absolutely synonymous, but are rather different nuances illuminating the dangerous attitudes resulting from divided devotion. The underlying premise is that it is impossible to effectively serve two different masters. Why is it impossible to serve the Lord and any other god? Read Mark 12:30. **The worship demanded by God is complete dedication. Anything less than complete consecration falls short of the worship He desires. It is therefore impossible to adequately worship God and anything else.**

When we try to serve anything alongside God, where does He end up in the contrasts Jesus describes? **He always ends up as the loser in our heart. The fact that He doesn't have our complete heart indicates that we do not find Him sufficient for all our needs and therefore either hate or despise Him.**

The first contrast provided by Jesus is love and hatred. Divided devotion results in one master being loved and the other being hated. How is the word "hate" used in other Scriptural passages? Read Genesis 29:30-31, Luke 14:26, Romans 9:13.

Sometimes, when the Scriptures use the word, "hate" it isn't describing a malevolent attitude but a ranking of affection, one being preferred above another.

Do you believe this the use of "hate" in Matthew 6:24 refers to outright hatred or rather a degree of preference? **I think it tends to refer to a degree of preference.**

Does it matter? Read James 4:4.

Even if our hatred only describes a preference, the result is the same. We put ourselves at odds with God when we prefer anything above Him.

The second contrast in Matthew 6:24 is that of "holding to" one master and "despising" the other. As we defined those terms above, they describe supporting or aligning ourselves with one master, while lightly esteeming the other. One of the most compelling examples I found of this attitude is in the book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a prophet to the Jews during their exile in Babylon. God used Ezekiel to provide a divine perspective on their captivity, including the reasons why they were captive and the means of deliverance. Of course, the Jews were not where they should be spiritually; that is why there were in bondage to begin with. Read Ezekiel 33:23-31 and discuss the attitude of the Jews toward Ezekiel and by extension, to God Himself. How can these attitudes manifest themselves in our lives?

The Israelites thought it good to have a prophet among them; they even enjoyed listening to him. Ezekiel was evidently an eloquent speaker. His words, however, fell upon deaf hearts because there was no movement to obey the Word of the Lord. They esteemed the things of the world and thought lightly of the things of God, even though there was no outspoken rebellion. This is a sobering example to us. How do you esteem the Word of God? Is it something interesting to learn but of little use to apply? Does it prompt serious self-reflection, repentance, and obedience?

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How Much is Worry Worth? (6:25-34)

“Take no thought” (KJV) is the theme of this passage and is an oft misunderstood concept. It does not mean that we are to live life without taking appropriate steps to provide for our personal welfare and those dependent upon us by working and reasonably planning for the future. What does it mean then?

If we were to scan this passage, we would see a variation of “take no thought” referenced no less than five times. Our understanding of this phrase is essential to a correct interpretation of Matthew 6:25-34. Sometimes, it is useful to see how a phrase is used elsewhere in Scripture to develop its definition in context. Begin by reading Matthew 10:19, 13:22, Luke 10:41, 1 Corinthians 7:32-34, 12:25, Philippians 2:20, 4:6, and 1 Peter 5:7; then formulate a definition for “take no thought”.

Take no thought – to focus or consume our thoughts on a specific issue. Depending on context, it can describe being anxious, distracted, or worried; or it can describe an appropriate focus on something important.

Now that we better understand “take no thought”, what should we avoid obsessing about? The answer is simple and direct: what you will eat, drink, and wear (a.k.a. the things of this world). Let me quickly ask an important question, does Jesus deny our need for food and clothing? **No, absolutely not; in fact He declares that the Father knows we have need of all these things (v32).**

Jesus breaks these basic needs into two categories: our life and our body. He also asks a very piercing question, which I will repeat in paraphrase, “isn’t your life about more than food, and your body than clothing”? Right here is the punch line to our passage.

What is life about for a Christian? Read Galatians 2:19-20, Philippians 1:21 and Colossians 3:1-4. **Life is about Christ. Our life is actually Christ’s. We were dead under sins and the life we have was purchased by Him for His glory. It is not our own; we were bought with a price. We have a higher purpose than sustaining our life through food and drink. We are to live for the glory of God.**

What is the purpose of a Christian’s body? Read Romans 6:19, 12:1, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, and Philippians 1:20. **Our body is a temple of the Lord, a dwelling place for the life that He purchased for us and is indwelt by His Spirit. Our body is the proving ground of our obedience to Christ; as our hearts follow Him, the body follows suit and pursues righteousness rather than vanity/emptiness. We are seeking to be clothed by righteousness, not just materials (Revelation 19:8).**

Christian, you were born again into a life made for more than food and clothing! You were called into the life of the King, to live for His purposes and glory.

This truth has profound implications for how we live day by day. For the Christian, your focus should not be on how you will provide for your next meal and the clothes you will wear. Your focus should be on how God wants you to invest your life and whether you are living to honor Him.

Look at the birds. Animals seem to be much better at living in accordance with the purpose of their existence than humans. Birds do what birds are supposed to do. God provides for them. He has not left them alone but continues to provide for them. Consider verse 26. Jesus asks a question: aren't we worth more than birds? What makes our value greater than that of a bird or other animal? Read Genesis 1:27, Romans 8:29 and 1 John 3:1.

All of mankind are created in the image of God. Those who are saved have been recreated in the image of Christ and made the sons and daughters of God. No animal can claim these distinctions.

What is the worth of worry? Jesus says that an inordinate focus on material things does not add one cubit to our stature. Another word for stature in the Greek is "age", pertaining to the length of our life. The point is that worry will not make us taller or lengthen our life. Scriptures and medical research suggest that just the opposite will occur. Read Proverbs 12:25 and 17:22, as well as the article below. What is the physical result of anxiety?

HOW STRESS, ANXIETY, AND DEPRESSION AFFECT YOUR HEALTH

Controlling stress is important to our health. Unrelenting stress can turn to distress. Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires a physical, mental, or emotional adjustment or response. Stress is a normal part of life. Many events that happen to you and around you -- and many things that you do to yourself -- put stress on your body. Some stress can be good. It keeps us alert, motivated, and ready to avoid danger. But too much stress can make us sick.

Stress that continues without relief can lead to a condition called distress -- a negative stress reaction.

Distress can disturb the body's internal balance or equilibrium, leading to physical symptoms such as headaches, an upset stomach, elevated blood pressure, chest pain, sexual dysfunction, and problems sleeping. Emotional problems can also result from distress. These problems include depression, panic attacks, or other forms of anxiety and worry. Research suggests that stress also can bring on or worsen certain symptoms or diseases. Stress is linked to six of the leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and even suicide.

Stress also becomes harmful when people engage in the compulsive use of substances or behaviors to try to relieve their stress. These substances or behaviors may include food, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, gambling, sex, shopping, and the Internet. Rather than relieving the stress and returning the body to a relaxed state, these substances and compulsive behaviors tend to keep the body in a stressed state causing more problems. The distressed person becomes trapped in a vicious circle.¹

A disturbed heart can make us physically sick and even stoop (making us appear shorter).

If you are going to expend that kind of energy on something, why not use it on something worthwhile?

¹ Taken from WebMD.com at: <http://www.webmd.com/depression/stress-anxiety-depression> on August 23, 2011.

The second illustration provided by Jesus deals with the body. Look at the flowers. They do not have a job, or weave clothing. Flowers do what they are supposed to do and God provides for them, making them beautiful beyond comparison. Solomon is mentioned as a point of comparison. He was one of the most powerful and wealthy men to ever live. He was able to array Himself in the most costly and gorgeous clothing from the farthest reaches of civilization. Yet, even Solomon's grandeur does not compare to the simple unadorned beauty of a flower. Just think, how many people hang pictures of well-dressed people they don't know up in their house for decoration? Not too many, right? What about pictures of flowers or the natural world? Which has more inherent beauty?

Jesus compares us to the flowers, just as He compared us with birds. If we are greater than birds, how much greater are we than flowers? After a flower dies, it is only suitable for use as kindling. This was common in the days of Christ, as dried flowers and grasses were used to fuel fires to heat food. Won't He take care of your needs, "O ye of little faith"? Let's stop and look at the other instances where Jesus rebukes the disciples for their "little faith". Read Matthew 8:26, 14:31, and 16:8. What is the common theme? **In each situation, the disciples were worried for their safety or for the provision of food. These concerns caused their faith to waiver. These are the matters of life and body Jesus addresses here. He wants us to be confident that we will have adequate food, clothing, and health in accordance with His purposes for our life, without question.**

In verses 31-32, Jesus provides a strong rebuke to anxious believers. Read Matthew 6:7-8 again. Why did the Gentiles pray with vain repetition? Also read 1 Corinthians 15:32. If Jesus did not rise from the dead and Christianity is just a fable, what is life about? **The Gentiles prayed in vain repetition because their god could not or would not hear and did not know or care about their needs. In fact, if there is no life beyond this one, life must only be about feeding our impulses. Jesus is reminding us that we have a life beyond this life and a God who knows our needs and gives us something greater to live for. He is a God who wants our hope to be fixed in heaven and He will take care of the things on earth.**

Anxiety is a proper response for unbelievers, but is unbecoming to children of God.

What is the proper focus for God's children? Remember that Jesus addresses the principles of life and body in this passage. Life was made for more than food and the body for more than clothing. I believe we have two corresponding purposes upon which to cast our gaze: God's kingdom and God's righteousness.

Harkening back to our study of Matthew 6:10, I provided an alternate translation of "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" as, "Let your reign over us begin, accomplishing your will on earth just as it is in heaven." The kingdom in practice involves the reign of Christ over our hearts and lives. Read the words of Jesus in John 4:5-8, 27-34. He provides the most potent illustration of this principle. What is life about for a Christian? **The purpose of life transcends fleshly wants and desires. We are created in God's image and recreated in the image of Christ to do advance the work of His kingdom in our hearts and in the lives of others.**

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What is the purpose for our body? Billions of dollars are spent in the United States each year on exercise, make-up, plastic surgery, and clothing. We all should strive to be good stewards of our bodies with appropriate eating, exercise, and clothing. Is this the only purpose of our bodies? Read 1 Timothy 2:9-10, 4:7-8, 1 Peter 3:3-4, and Revelation 19:7-8 and discuss the greater goal that God has for our bodies. **God's desire is that our bodies would be brought under subjection of the Spirit and that we would learn to practically live out God's righteousness in this lost and dying world. This clothing will someday become visible for all to see, will be incomparably glorious, and last forever.**

Finally, Jesus exhorts us to not place an inordinate focus on the future and what may happen. He explains that we have enough to deal with today without adding tomorrow's trouble to it. Why is it improper (and a waste of time) to worry about the future? Read James 4:13-15. **We do not know what the future holds. We may have expectations of evil that the Lord will deliver us from. There may be problems but they might be different than what we anticipated. We just don't know.**

What do the Scriptures teach us about God's grace and mercy? Read Lamentations 3:22-23, Matthew 10:19, and Hebrews 4:16. **God's grace and mercy are given to us new each morning, at the moment of need, and upon request. Although there is an infinite supply, there is only a portion on our plate. To focus upon a day that has not dawned is to live outside of the realm of God's supply of grace and mercy. That is a land in which no one can survive.**

Don't get ahead of God's grace; live in today. (Psalm 118:24)