

Matt. 6:19-24

Intro:

In this larger section of the Sermon on the Mount, consisting of this passage and the next (6:25-34), Jesus addressed and challenged our “ultimates.” That is, He challenged His hearers to consider what is their ultimate desire, their ultimate authority, their ultimate goal and purpose. He was challenging people to make God their ultimate standard and reference in every part of their life and reject any form of idolatry.

In every aspect of our lives, we are constantly making choices, in big and small issues. In every choice, we must choose one option over others. And we always make decisions based on what we value more. For example, some people value money over time and safety. So, they will spend their time and risk their safety in order to get money. Some people are willing to give away their freedom in order to secure their safety (which is always a foolish choice, because losing freedom is to give away the ability to protect your safety and security). So, everyone has a set of priorities in what they value that impacts their choices, for better or worse.

And sooner or later, by our choices, we will demonstrate what we value and trust the very most, by always choosing it over other options. What always wins when we are forced to choose? This is our “ultimate” – that which we desire and trust more than anything else. That is our “god.” And so, we must honestly evaluate what truly is our “ultimate.” Is it the One True God, or is it some form of idol?

This passage is a continuation of the previous section in challenging our motivations in order for us to have the correct actions, which flow from the correct motivations and attitudes. In the previous passages, Jesus challenged His hearers to do good works with the proper motivation and for the best reward. In this passage, Jesus taught His hearers to examine, acknowledge, and, if necessary, change our “ultimate,” knowing that our “ultimate” will always decisively influence our motivations, choices, and actions in all of our life.

I. Your ultimate treasure will determine your heart (19-21)

The point that Jesus made in this first section is that the identity of your “ultimate” is extremely important, because all of your life will follow after your “ultimate.” We all pursue the thing or things that we treasure the most. And what that treasure is, will determine what our life pursuits will be. And therefore, we should be very careful what we choose as our ultimate treasure. Don’t choose a treasure that will let you down. There are some treasures that don’t satisfy. There are some treasures that are easily lost once they are gained. And so, Jesus taught to pursue the kind of treasure that will eternally satisfy because it is certain and durable. He did this by contrasting the kind of treasure that is found on earth and the kind of treasure that is stored in heaven.

A. Wisely choose your ultimate treasure (19-20)

In these verses, Jesus commanded His disciples to examine and wisely choose the kind of treasure they love and pursue. He pointed out that there are different kinds of treasure, and He divided treasure into two categories: that which is insecure and temporary, and that which is secure and eternal. In verse 19, He warned against loving insecure and temporary treasure. And then in verse 20, He commanded us to love secure and eternal treasure.

1. Neg: Don’t pursue unsafe, insecure, temporary treasure (19)

This verse is the negative warning against temporary, insecure treasure. Jesus spoke of this kind of treasure as being stored up “on the earth.”

a Do not treasure up treasure for yourself on the earth (19a)

The verb “treasure up” is closely related to the noun “treasure” that refers to that which is treasured. Both words come from the idea of storing something for long term benefit. But they also clearly refer to something that is valuable and worth having and storing because of its value and usefulness. Jesus used the same word here (referring to earthly treasure) that He will use in v. 20 for heavenly treasure. He used the same word for both kinds of treasure, because they are both treasured. But it also clearly implied that they are different kinds of treasure, because one is stored on earth, and one in heaven. By commanding not to store up our treasure on earth, Jesus is setting up a contrast between different kinds of treasure based on where that treasure is located. He will contrast the

“earthly” things we could treasure with the “heavenly” things we should treasure. Only certain things can be stored on earth, and only certain things can be stored in heaven. And Jesus commanded that we not treasure the “earthly” things. This is consistent with other statements in the New Testament, such as 1 Jn. 2:15-17, where John wrote (among other things) “Do not love the world or the things in the world.” It is important to clearly understand what Jesus and John meant (and what they did not mean) when they said and wrote these things. There is a sense in which we should love the people and things of the world by desiring and working for what is best for them. We should love everyone, including our enemies in this sense. That is the sense in which “God so loved the world...” (Jn. 3:16). But that is not what Jesus and John were talking about. We should not love the world in the sense that it or anything in it is our “ultimate” – our highest delight and goal. Because the world and all the treasure that is in it is as dung compared with God and all the heavenly things connected with Him (see Phil. 3:7-9). And by commanding us not to treasure up treasure on earth, Jesus was indicating that we can, at least to some extent, determine for ourselves what we treasure. Yes, we are influenced by many things. We are drawn away toward useless treasure by our sinful fallen nature. And we need a work of God’s Spirit in our lives to see and love the beauty of Christ. But we are also responsible to choose our treasure, to put our mind and affections on the things that we are to treasure as our “ultimate.” And Jesus commanded us not to do this with earthly things.

b Where it is unsafe and insecure, i.e. temporary (19b-d)

In this section, Jesus elaborated on why we should not treasure up treasure on earth. And by doing so, He described some of the characteristics of earthly treasure that make it unworthy to be our “ultimate,” concentrating on its temporary and perishable nature. The location of this treasure makes it subject to two dangers: It may be destroyed, and it may be taken away.

1) Where moth and corrosion destroy (19b)

This proposition highlights that earthly treasure is subject to corrosion and destruction. Jesus gave two examples of things that ruin earthly treasures. First, He mentioned moths, which consume clothing and other similar goods. In modern times, people use “mothballs” to keep insects away from ruining clothing and valuable textiles. And second Jesus mentioned corrosion, which is sometimes translated as “rust.” Rust is a good example of the kind of corrosion which Jesus was talking about, because it causes iron things to waste away and destroyed. However, the word Jesus used is more general than rust. Therefore, the corrosion Jesus mentioned would not only destroy iron, but would also tarnish, corrode, and otherwise spoil and destroy all other materials as well. His word covers all of these kinds of corrosion. Jesus used these two terms as examples of the kind of decay inherent in all earthly materials. All treasures stored up on earth will fail because they are subject to various kinds of consumption, corrosion, and destruction. They are not permanent and will eventually fall short as an “ultimate.”

2) And treasure is stolen (19c-d)

And not only are earthly treasures subject to corrosion and destruction, they are also subject to being taken away. In these two propositions, Jesus continued giving the reasons not to treasure up treasures on earth by mentioning thieves who may steal this kind of treasure, in order to point out the insecurity of earthly treasure.

a) And where thieves break in (19c)

The word “thieves” refers to any and all people who steal. There are people who want earthly treasure enough to try to attain it by immoral means. The presence of thieves and the possibility of having our property stolen is a reality in this fallen world. In this proposition, Jesus mentioned that they “break in.” This draws attention to the fact that thieves are willing to break through barriers and walls and safes in order to get at other people’s property. Locked doors, strong boxes, and security precautions are good and will often delay or deter thieves. But no precautions are able to completely guarantee that a determined and resourceful thief will not be able to get past any security measures we take in this world. So, before mentioning that a thief will steal (in the next proposition), Jesus mentioned that they will break in, through whatever security barriers are in place.

b) And they steal (19d)

This proposition is the completion of the thought begun in the previous one. After a thief breaks in, he will steal the earthly treasure. The point that Jesus was making was that treasures stored up on earth are liable to being taken away from us, and therefore are not reliable and secure enough to be our “ultimate” treasure.

In this verse, Jesus spoke about moths, corrosion and thieves as the reason treasure is not to be stored up on earth. But the difference between earthly and heavenly treasure is about more than just moths and thieves. It is more than just temporary and insecure vs. eternal and secure. It is ultimately about the comparative worth of the two kinds of treasure.

However, Jesus emphasized the temporariness and insecurity of earthly treasure as a key way to point out its comparative worthlessness. But He also put the spotlight on the reason why people are tempted to delight in earthly treasure. The temptation of earthly treasure is its current availability and present tangible experience. We are tempted to store up our treasures on earth, because here we can currently control and experience this treasure, whereas we must wait in faith to experience much of our treasure stored in heaven.

In other words, by pointing out the corrosion and temporary nature of earthly treasure, Jesus was promoting delayed gratification and faith in God’s eternal promises. And He was confronting a “have it now” philosophy. Disciples need to be wise and play the long game in our treasure investments. We can have a temporary, ephemeral treasure right now, which will not ultimately satisfy. Or we can patiently and faithfully wait in the hope of the promised eternal, secure treasure, which will eternally satisfy. Fulton Sheen once wrote that there are two general philosophies of life: Some people say, “let’s feast now, and worry about the hangover later.” And some people say, “I’m willing to fast now, in order to enjoy the feast later.” Jesus was pointing out the stupidity of the first attitude and training His disciples to have the second. We are not to treasure up treasure on earth simply because that is a stupid investment which will leave us treasureless in the end.

2. Pos: Rather, pursue safe, secure, eternal treasure (20)

This verse gives the positive contrast to the negative command in the previous verse. We are commanded **not** to store up treasure *on earth*. But we **are** commanded to store up treasure *in heaven*.

a Rather, treasure up treasure for yourself in heaven (20a)

This section is the continuation of the comparison and contrast begun in verse 19. And this proposition is parallel to 19a. The wording is almost exactly the same, except this proposition does not contain the word “not,” and it has the phrase “in heaven” instead of the phrase “on the earth.” It uses the same words for “treasure up” and “treasure” with the same meanings. But they refer to different realities, and therefore, have different emphases. In this proposition, the word “treasure” refers to transcendent things; it does not refer to material treasure, but refers to non-material things. Our treasure in heaven refers primarily to God Himself, Who is the greatest treasure imaginable. But this can also include the rewards mentioned (but not defined or described) in the previous passages.

Heaven is defined as the transcendent dwelling place (or throne) of God. So, treasure stored up in heaven is all in relation to God, and ultimately from God, and an expression of His greatness and goodness. Because knowing and experiencing God is the ultimate treasure and goal of any genuine disciple. Because God literally is the One Ultimate Being, our “ultimate” should be God Himself, and everything only in relation to Him. And therefore, we can “treasure up” this treasure by knowing and experiencing God through Jesus, through genuine, faithful, obedient discipleship as described in this sermon and throughout the New Testament.

b Where it is safe and secure, i.e. eternal (20b-d)

This section is parallel to 19b-d, giving the opposite reason we should treasure up treasure in heaven as opposed to treasuring up treasure on earth. And by doing so, Jesus described some of the characteristics of heavenly treasure that make it more worthy to be our “ultimate,” concentrating on its eternal and secure nature. The location of this treasure guarantees that it will not be destroyed, and it will not be taken away. But, just as the deficiency of earthly treasure is more than just being temporary, the greatness of heavenly treasure is more than just being eternal. We can all imagine something that would be great for a little while, but which would become boring after a while. We have all probably had a similar experience with toys as children. They were all we wanted, and we were thrilled with them, but we also eventually outgrew them. Our heavenly treasure will be of such a nature that we will never outgrow it or become bored with it. Our heavenly treasure needs to be as infinite in greatness as it is eternal in duration. And that is why God, and not any of His gifts, needs to be our “ultimate.” Only God is so infinitely glorious and good that we will experience Him as greater and greater throughout all eternity. God is as infinite in His awesomeness as eternity is infinite in length.

1) Where neither moth nor corrosion destroy (20b)

This proposition is parallel to 19b. It uses the exact same wording as 19b except that it adds the negatives “neither” and “nor” to make this proposition state the exact opposite of 19b. This proposition highlights that heavenly treasure is not subject to corrosion and destruction. Jesus described the glorious, new nature of everything in heaven, as compared to earth. Just as Paul wrote that we will all be changed, because the perishable cannot inherit the imperishable (see 1 Cor. 15:50-51), everything in heaven is of a different kind of nature and life than in our present earthly experience. Revelation tells us that heaven will come down to earth, and our eternal existence will somehow be in a new heaven and new earth. We will not be disembodied spirits, but have renewed bodies. But our new bodies and the new nature of the new heavens and new earth will be dramatically different from our present bodies and experience.

And the glorious new nature of the next age, coming from heaven, will not be subject to corrosion or destruction. Moths may still exist in the next age (we don’t know yet), but they will not destroy our garments. Iron may still exist, and it still may have the same

chemical properties that make it able to oxidize, but rust will not disintegrate, nor will any other forms of corrosion tear down the things that we treasure. This creation was created very good, and corrosion, destruction, and death were only introduced into this creation by the fall into sin (see Gen chs. 1-3) All of creation waits in eager expectation for the time when it will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God (see Rom. 8:19-21). The very nature of heaven is of an unspoiled and/or renewed creation, so that corrosion and destruction are not a part of that reality.

2) **And treasure is not stolen (20c-d)**

This section is a continuation of the thought began in 20b. It is also parallel to 19c-d, giving the positive alternative in contrast to what was described there. Heaven is the dwelling place of God, unspoiled by sin. And our experience of heaven in the next age will be a glorious new reality, completely different from our present age. There is no sin in heaven, and there will be no sin in the next age. Paul clearly wrote that thieves (among others) will not inherit the Kingdom of God (see 1 Cor. 6:10). There is no sin in heaven, therefore, there is no stealing. There are no unredeemed sinners in heaven, therefore, there are no thieves. In heaven, there is no need or temptation to covet and steal. Everything in heaven is completely blessed and fulfilled, so there is no possibility of theft. And therefore, everything is completely secure in every way, because God's perfect rule is completely manifested in heaven, and in all of the next age.

a) **And where thieves do not break in (20c)**

This proposition is parallel to 19c. It uses exactly the same wording as that proposition with the addition of the word "not" to make it say the exact opposite of 19c.

b) **And neither do they steal (20d)**

This proposition is parallel to 19d. It uses exactly the same wording as that proposition with the addition of the word "neither" to make it say the exact opposite of 19d. Jesus clearly used repetition, making verse 20 parallel with 19 in order to make His statements more memorable, and to highlight the contrast between the two treasures.

In this verse, Jesus commanded us to treasure up treasure in heaven, in obvious contrast to storing up treasure on earth. He used the contrast between the temporary and insecure nature of earthly treasure compared with the secure and eternal nature of heavenly treasure as the stated reason for making the wise choice. But this also about the comparative worth of the two kinds of treasure. Only one kind of "ultimate" is worthy of being our "ultimate" because it genuinely is ultimate. Only God Himself is worthy of being our ultimate treasure. And therefore, we need to treasure Him, even in this world, even though He can seem less tangible than earthly realities. We need to live in hope and faith in His promises, knowing that by doing so, we are storing up treasures that cannot be, and never will be taken away. We are storing up treasure that will satisfy for all eternity because our treasure is in God Himself, Who is more real, and more valuable, and more ultimate, than anything else in existence.

B. Reason: Your heart automatically will follow your treasure (21)

In this verse, Jesus gave the foundational reason to choose treasure wisely. The reason is that our heart inevitably follows our treasure. We automatically love and make decisions based on what we think is most desirable and most valuable. Our affections will always follow our “ultimate,” and therefore, it is very important what our “ultimate” is.

Notice that Jesus did not teach His disciples that their treasure will follow their heart, but He taught the other way around. Our culture often focuses on the heart, saying “follow your heart.” But according to the Bible, that is unnecessary advice, because we automatically follow our heart. Rather, we should “guard your heart, because it is the wellspring of life” (Prov. 4: 23). Everything in our life is directly influenced by the state of our heart. And “follow your heart” is horrible advice, because “the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jer. 17:9). However, Jesus did not say “get your heart right and your treasure will follow.” He said, “get your treasure right, and your heart will be right, because your heart always goes where your treasure is.” The point that Jesus was making is that we guard our heart *by* guarding and wisely choosing our treasure. If we get the right treasure, then our heart will follow into good places. If we get the wrong treasure, then our heart will follow into bad places. Therefore, we should guard and get our heart right by getting our treasure right, by treasuring up treasure in heaven, with God.

1. For wherever your treasure is (21a)

This proposition is the first part of one main idea, expressed in two propositions. Technically, this gives the location for the action of the next proposition. Jesus began this idea by giving the location as “wherever your treasure is.” In the previous two verses, He gave two possibilities: “on the earth” or “in heaven.” And each person will store up their treasure in one of these two locations. Where our treasure is treasured up will determine what will be true in the next proposition.

And, based on the previous two verses, the wise choice is for our treasure to be stored up in heaven, with God. As Paul wrote in Col. 3:1-3, “...set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

2. Your heart will also be there (21b)

This is the completion of the idea begun in the previous proposition. The previous proposition gave the content of the word “there” in this proposition. Therefore, the meaning of this proposition is dependent on the place that is true as described in the previous one. If our treasure is on the earth, our heart will be on the earth. If our treasure is in heaven, then our heart will be in heaven. The point of these two propositions together is that our heart will inevitably seek after and follow our treasure, wherever it is. And therefore, the location of our treasure will determine what our heart will automatically pursue, and therefore, what our affections and actions will be. If we are wise, then our treasure will be stored up in heaven, with Christ, in God.

And so, we can ask, “What does it look like for our heart to be in heaven, with Christ, in God?” Paul partly answered that question in the quote from Colossians given in the comment on the previous proposition. And Jesus answered that question throughout the Sermon on the Mount. For instance, in the Beatitudes, He pronounced blessing on those who live by heavenly priorities and display heavenly character. He defined righteousness by inward heart affections and attitudes more than by outward actions in keeping the Law (5:17-48). In the earlier passages in chapter 6, He described those who do not live for rewards from people, but live to please God and receive their reward from Him. Later, He will command His disciples to “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (6:33) and to “enter through the narrow gate.” (7:13) and to hear His words and put them into practice (7:24). And, of course, throughout the rest of the New Testament, Jesus and the apostles proclaim the Gospel and the proper response of genuine disciples, including instructions on how to live in light of the Gospel, which is to live for Christ and delight in Him, Who is in Heaven, and to conform our heart to Him. Our ultimate treasure will determine our heart, and our heart will determine our life. If God in Christ is our ultimate treasure, this will determine all of our attitudes and actions, leading to eternal life.

II. Your ultimate focus and purpose determines your life (22-23)

This second section in this passage is somewhat difficult to understand at first. It is not immediately apparent what is meant by “the eye is the lamp of the body.” However, when we put this section in the context of the larger passage, it is much easier to grasp what Jesus was talking about. This section partly answers the question “How do we store up treasure?” It acknowledges and teaches that whatever fills our attention fills our mind and eventually fills our entire life. And in this section Jesus also warned that focusing on evil things will have a tremendously detrimental effect on our minds, hearts, attitudes, and actions. Therefore, our ultimate focus – what we most often and most intensely put our focus upon – will determine our life, because that will be what we treasure.

A. What you focus upon determines your life (22-23b)

1. The lamp of the body is the eye (22a)

In this proposition, Jesus used the metaphor of a lamp. A lamp was an oil pot that fed a flame used to illuminate a room or any dark place. A modern equivalent would be a flashlight. In a dark place, whatever we shine the flashlight upon is what we see – what we concentrate on. In this proposition, Jesus said that our eye functions in this way. Whatever we turn our eyes to look at is what we concentrate on. Our sight is one of, if not the primary sense by which we interact with the world. The experts say that we remember what we see more than we remember what we hear. Our sight has a strong influence on our mind. And therefore, whatever we put our eyes on with concentrated attention (as opposed to an unintentional glance) will have a strong influence on our thinking and eventually our worldview. The entire body somehow responds to and follows wherever the attention of the eyes leads it.

Throughout the Bible, the eyes are spoken about in this way. Things are pleasing or displeasing “in the eyes of” someone. Things are good or evil “in the sight of” someone. People can find favor or rejection “in the eyes of” someone. When people come to a profound realization, it is said that “their eyes were opened.” And therefore, godly people determined not to let their eyes look at evil things (see, for example, Job 31:1, Psa. 101:3, 119:37) rather, their eyes are on the Lord (see, for example, Psa. 25:15, 123:2, 141:8). But evil people have no fear of God “before their eyes” (see, for example, Psa. 36:1) and their eyes wander to worthless things (see, for example, Prov. 17:24).

2. Your life depends on what you ultimately focus upon (22b-23b)

This section is the natural consequence and implication of the truth Jesus spoke in the previous proposition. If the eye is the lamp of the body, if the body follows where the focus of the eyes goes, then our life is strongly influenced by whatever we focus our eyes upon, either for good or for bad.

a Pos: If the focus of your life is good, your life will be good (22b-c)

This is the positive possibility: that a person’s eye will focus on good things and therefore have a positive impact on their life.

1) Therefore, if your eye is without guile/straightforward (22b)

This proposition begins with the word “therefore.” This connects this entire section (22b-23b) to the previous proposition (22a). This section is an inference which is true because the eye is the lamp of the body. Because the eye is the lamp of the body, the quality and focus of the eye will have an impact on the entire body – the mind, attitude and actions. This proposition is closely connected with the following one in a conditional relationship. If the statement of this proposition is true, it will have the effect described in the following proposition. This proposition gives the positive possibility, that an eye may be good. Jesus described this as an eye being without guile. This term has the connotation of being simple, straightforward, and sincere, without hidden motives or agendas. And it may also have the implication of generosity. Overall, it conveys the idea of “what you see is what you get,” “genuine” with nothing deceptive, and “without ulterior motive.” This kind of eye is simple and not divided by other loyalties and

schemes, in contrast to the kind of divided loyalties described in v. 24. And it is pure in the sense of not being diluted and intermixed with other focuses. An “eye without guile,” therefore, basically means to be single-minded, to not have an inward struggle based on divided loyalties. And this assumes that the single focus will be on godly things, and not a single-minded focus on pursuing evil.

2) **Your whole body will be illuminated (22c)**

This proposition describes the effect if the statement of the previous proposition proves true in anyone’s life. If someone’s eye is simply focused on godly things, their whole body will be fully of light. And Jesus used the adjective “whole” to emphasize that the entirety of the body will be affected. The entirety of a person’s life is impacted by the quality of their eye (or lack thereof). The body with a good eye will be illumined and therefore, bright and radiant. That may have the implication, not only that the entire life will be illuminated for good, but also that the entire life would outwardly give evidence of that goodness (typically through the manifest godliness of good deeds).

A singleness of attention on good things will have a positive outcome on a person’s life. That is why Paul told the Philippians to think about “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy” (Phil. 4:8 NIV). To have this kind of blessed, healthy input into our minds, lives, and attitudes will change our lives for the better. So, we should be single-mindedly focused on good, godly things. That is why we should consistently fill our minds with Scripture and remind ourselves of the Gospel on a regular basis. It will fill our life with blessing and light.

b **Neg: If the focus of your life is bad, your life will be bad (23a-b)**

This is the negative possibility: that a person’s eye will focus on bad things and therefore have a negative impact on their life.

1) **But if your eye is evil/diseased (23a)**

This proposition is exactly the same wording as 22b except that the word “without guile” is replaced with the word “evil.” This word “evil” which Jesus used in this proposition is normally used for something that is morally worthless and defective, therefore evil and degenerate. But it can also mean worthless in the sense of poor quality, or in the sense of an unhealthy physical condition. It is similar to the English word “sick,” which can mean a physical sickness as well as a moral degeneracy. In this proposition, both of these meanings are possible. But the point is that this eye is somehow defective, likely by being filled with sick and morally worthless things that it focused upon, and it will therefore, have adverse impact on the entire body.

This verse may also be making reference to Proverbs 21:4, which says “Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!” (NIV). If this is the case, this proposition would also have the implication of arrogance. And in Proverbs, this is also called a “lamp,” both being sin, and leading into more sin. There is an old cliché that says “garbage in, garbage out.” This saying originated from computer programming, but it also applies to our moral lives. If we feed our eyes with garbage and darkness, then we should not be surprised if our life is characterized by garbage and darkness.

2) **Your whole body will be darkened (23b)**

This proposition is exactly the same wording as 22c except the word “darkened” replaced the word “enlightened.” Jesus said that the inevitable result of a sick/evil eye is that the entire body will be in a state of darkness. As in the rest of the New Testament, “light” and “darkness” are often used symbolically for the moral concepts of “good” and “evil” respectively. A life filled with the input focused primarily on dark and evil things will be filled with darkness and evil, and will automatically be characterized by an evil, twisted mind, which leads to an evil, twisted attitude, which works out in evil, twisted actions.

This is constantly demonstrated in many unfortunate examples from everyday life. People who fill their minds with depressing and gloomy things will have a negative and gloomy attitude and lifestyle. People who fill their minds with violence and depravity tend to act out in violent and depraved ways. There are famous examples of notorious criminals who have talked about their early lives. They told of filling their minds with violent entertainment and pornography, which they confessed had a decisive impact in making them the violent sociopaths they became. Jesus clearly taught that the focus of our eyes will determine the result in our life. And that included a warning of the dark consequences of having an evil eye, filling our life with evil and dark things.

B. If your ultimate purpose is bad, your life will be bad (23c-d)

The final two propositions of this verse pick up on the previous section, which gave both the positive and negative possibilities and their effects. However, these propositions emphasize only the negative possibility in order to issue a strong warning against that possibility. This section starts with the word “therefore” showing that this is the inference and application from the previous section. Because there are two possibilities, given in the previous section, and because the negative possibility is bad, this section brings out the further implications of how bad the negative possibility really is.

1. Therefore, if the light in you is darkness (23c)

This proposition is a conditional statement, setting up for the following proposition. This is the same kind of construction seen twice in 22b-23b. And the content of this condition, at first glance, seems like a contradiction. Jesus spoke of the possibility of light being darkness. But this is an exaggeration in order to illustrate a strong point. On the one hand, it is a play on “light” and “lamp.” The point is that if the “lamp,” the thing that is supposed to give light, is dark, then the whole room remains in darkness, because there is no light to offset the darkness. On the other hand, because “light” and “darkness” are themselves symbolic language for moral categories of “good” and “evil,” this is an illustration of the possibility that a person’s “good” is so corrupt or lacking that it would validly be considered “evil.” Their “light” is really better described as “darkness.” If that which is supposed to be the positive is really more on the negative side of the scale, that is an indication that the entire entity has radically shifted toward the negative side. And therefore, that which is negative, must be even further down toward the negative end of the scale. In other words, if the thing that gives light is not actually light, but the opposite, then the entire person is doubly slanted toward the opposite. In this case, there is no source or possibility of light, and so, there will only be darkness. If the lamp concentrates only on the dark things, it does not bring light to the body. Rather, it adds even more darkness, making it more and more dark. And Jesus described this as “the light *in you*.” There is something in us that delights in some things and rejects others. There is something that determines what we focus upon, based on what we delight in. There is something in us that is automatically drawn toward what is our “ultimate.” If that part of our nature is corrupted by and characterized by darkness, if it is drawn toward the darkness and focuses on evil things, then we will be drawn toward ever-increasing levels of darkness. Evil and sin tend to lead us into more and deeper evil and sin unless something intervenes.

2. How severe/total the darkness must be! (23d)

This proposition is the result if the condition of the previous proposition is true. If the eye, which is supposed to bring light to the body only brings darkness, the body will totally be characterized by darkness. If our physical eyes and inner faculties, which are created to be a primary gateway of light and truth into our life, are corrupted, so that they only bring darkness and evil into our life, our life will be completely filled with darkness.

The phrase that Jesus used is an exclamation and declaration about the extent of the darkness. “How intense is the darkness!” It is almost an expression of shock at the high magnitude of the darkness. It is an expression of the severity and totality of the darkness that is inevitable in a life where the eye, the lamp, is characterized by darkness. If our ultimate focus is on darkness, then how dark will the life inevitably be? Therefore, this is a strong warning against allowing our

ultimate focus to be drawn to any form of darkness. Because darkness compounds and leads to the total darkening of a life, if not guarded against. The negative consequences are so severe, that Jesus strongly warned against this possibility. Our ultimate focus determines our life, and therefore, an ultimate focus on something that is dark determines an extremely dark destiny.

III. You can only have one ultimate master (24)

This verse is the third major section in this passage about “ultimates.” In this verse, Jesus stressed that there can be only one “ultimate” by definition, and explained why this is so. And He used money as an illustration and application of this truth because money is commonly a rival “ultimate” to God in people’s lives.

A. You can’t have more than one ultimate master (24a-e)

1. No one is able to serve two masters (24a)

In this proposition, Jesus stated His main thesis in this verse, before illustrating and applying it in the rest of this verse. He stated that it is impossible for anyone to serve two masters as “ultimates.” Of course, it is possible to have two bosses, or two people who tell us what to do, and who have authority over us. But the core issue will show itself whenever these two people tell us to do opposite or different things. We cannot obey both at the same time, and so a choice will necessarily have to be made. At this point, it becomes clear who is the more ultimate boss. I recently read the illustration of a dog following two men. If you see two men walking down the road with a dog following them, it might be difficult to determine which man is the dog’s owner and master. But whenever the two men take different roads, it becomes very clear who is the dog’s master, because the dog will only follow one of the two men. In the same way, when we have competing desires and loyalties in our life, going in two different directions, when we need to make a choice, we cannot serve both of them equally. And the choice we make will be based on whatever is our more “ultimate” master. And the choices we make will demonstrate what our “ultimate” master really is. It is impossible to follow two different masters which are going in different directions.

2. He will have greater affection for one master, and the other will be shorted (24b-e)

In this section, Jesus showed the reason that no one can serve more than one master. To a certain extent, He was speaking hyperbolically, exaggerating the difference of loyalties and affections to the extremes of love and hate in order to make His point more dramatically. But when it comes down to the choices that demonstrate what is our “ultimate,” the differences displayed are as great as the difference between love and hate, because the loser will be totally discarded in favor of the “ultimate” one as if it had been hated all along.

a He will have opposite heart affection toward the different masters (24b-c)

Jesus used hyperbolic language to explain the difference in affection toward the different masters. His meaning here is similar to Luke 14:26, where He said “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” In that verse, Jesus was not saying that people who are naturally hateful toward their family will be better disciples. Rather, He was saying that they must be so committed to Him that their commitment toward their family would seem like hatred by comparison. This was in the context of calling His disciples to count the cost of discipleship and take up their cross, in order to follow Him (Lk 14:27-33). So, this language is about decisively preferring one’s “ultimate” over all other things. In practice, it may be that we just love one master more than the other. But it also means that we will completely reject the non-ultimate master if it is necessary.

These first two propositions speak more of the heart affections toward the “ultimate.” This also has the connotation of the actions that flow from these affections.

1) Neg: For, he will either hate the one (24b)

This proposition starkly states that the person confronted with two possible masters will hate one of them by comparison with the one who is the “ultimate.” This thought is completed in the next proposition where Jesus gave the other possibility.

2) Pos: and love the other (24c)

This proposition is the completion of the contrast begun in the previous proposition. When put in a situation with two possible masters, a person will, of necessity, reject one of them (as communicated in the previous proposition) and serve the other one. Jesus described this in stark language of the affections choosing one master over the other. We will “love” our “ultimate” master, and hate the other one by comparison.

b He will have opposite mental evaluation of the different masters (24d-e)

This section is parallel to 24b-c, giving fuller illustration of the thesis which Jesus was making about not being able to serve two masters. He continued to do this by contrasting dramatically different responses toward the two possible masters. In this section, the terms Jesus used were not as much affections, as in the previous section, but about mental evaluations and loyalties.

1) Pos: or he will be devoted to one (24d)

In this proposition, which is parallel to 24c, Jesus stated the positive possibility first in the contrast, which is switching the order from 24b-c. Jesus said that the person will be devoted to one. This term means to hold fast to someone in loyalty because of a strong attachment and positive mental evaluation of the person that concludes that they are worthy of such a strong loyalty.

2) Neg: and he will despise the other (24e)

This proposition is the negative conclusion to the contrast begun in the previous proposition. It is parallel to 24b in describing the rejection of one possible master in favor of the “ultimate” master. The term “despise” means to have a mental evaluation of something that is so negative that it has contempt and aversion toward it, because it is thought to have so little value, and/or to be so disgusting and contemptible. It is the proper attitude toward something that actually is worthless – to scorn and reject it. But Jesus used this term to describe something that is rejected with similar scorn, even though, on its own, it may have some value. But it is considered to have no value when compared with something that is “ultimate.” When forced to choose, anything that is not our “ultimate” will be rejected with such contempt and scorn as if completely worthless, because it is comparatively worthless when in competition with our “ultimate.”

B. You are not able to serve God and worldly wealth (24f)

In this last proposition of this section and passage, Jesus used money both as an illustration and application of the point He had been making. The word “mammon” which He used, means all kinds of wealth, riches, and property, and has a negative connotation in Luke 16 by being connected with the word “unrighteous.” So, though money can have good and neutral uses, Jesus here used it for materialism and delight in this-worldly wealth as opposed to trusting and delighting in God and heavenly things. Jesus used money as an example of a rival “ultimate” to God. We cannot serve God as our “ultimate” if money and material things are, in fact, our “ultimate.”

Money is the rival “ultimate” which Jesus used in this passage to illustrate something that might take our loyalty away from God if we misplace it in a false, rival “ultimate.” But money is not the only possible rival “ultimate.” There are many other things that are also potential rivals for our ultimate loyalty and affections, Jesus just chose money from among many possibilities to illustrate this truth.

However, money is a very fitting illustration, because it is a very common rival for people’s trust and affections, which brings many people into idolatry. To be clear, almost no one is enamored with the pieces of paper or coins in themselves. But people delight in the security, control, power, influence, and many other things that money represents and that money is a primary means to obtain. Money gives the illusion that those who have it are more in control of their lives than those who do not. Money is occasionally highlighted other places in the New Testament as a potential danger. Paul wrote that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10) and he equated covetousness/greed with idolatry (Col. 3:5).

Money is such that it invites our ultimate allegiance based on all that it promises to obtain for us.

Therefore, money is a dangerous rival “ultimate” and we cannot serve both God and money. We are forced to choose one or the other. But we should choose wisely based on all that Jesus has said in this passage. Because money is not eternal, and will always let us down. Nothing in this world is a good “ultimate.” And therefore, we should completely reject the temptation to allow them to have our ultimate loyalty and delight. Rather, we should hate and despise them by comparison with the love and delight which we have in God, Who is our only worthy “ultimate” because He actually is ultimate in all the universe.