

## Single-Minded Devotion

Matthew 6:19-24

Some of you might know the name Clarence Jordan. In the early 1950's he founded Koinonia Farm, a community in Americus, Georgia, where blacks and whites, rich and poor could live together as a show of solidarity and as a protest against racism. That was a very controversial project for that day. Habitat for Humanity traces its roots to Koinonia Farm. Clarence had a brother named Robert who was an influential attorney in Georgia. Clarence approached Robert, asking him to provide some legal assistance to Koinonia Farm. Here's how Clarence's brother responded:

"Clarence, I can't do that. You know my political aspirations. Why if I represented you, I might lose my job, my house, everything I've got."

"We might lose everything too, Bob."

"It's different for you."

"Why is it different? I remember, it seems to me, that you and I joined the same church the same Sunday, as boys. I expect when we came forward the same preacher asked me about the same question he did you. He asked me, 'Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?' And I said, 'Yes.' What did you say?"

"I follow Jesus, Clarence, up to a point."

"Could that point by any chance be – the cross?"

"That's right. I follow him to the cross, but not on the cross. I'm not getting myself crucified."

"Then I don't believe you're a disciple. You're an admirer of Jesus, but not a disciple of his. I think you ought to go back to the church you belong to and tell them you're an admirer not a disciple."

"Well now, if everyone who felt like I do did that, we wouldn't have a church, would we?"

"The question is," Clarence said, "*do you have a church?*"

Cited in *The Feast*, Joshua Graves, pp. 38-39

That's a great question to ponder: Do you really have a church if the people in it aren't actually disciples who deny themselves, take up their crosses daily, and follow Him – whatever the cost.

Today we return to our sermon series on discipleship from the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 6:19-24 Jesus challenges His disciples to have single-minded devotion to God. Since Jesus had single-minded devotion to His heavenly Father it only makes sense that His disciples would learn the same. As Clarence Jordan pointed out, you have to ask the question whether we're disciples or just admirers of Jesus if we aren't becoming like Him in single-minded

devotion to God. Each of the three sections of this passage suggests a question which challenges us to consider this issue of single-minded devotion to God and whether we're admirers or disciples of Jesus.

***What do I treasure above all else? (Matthew 6:19-21)*** In these verses Jesus has us evaluate our "treasures." Your treasures are those things that you value above everything else. People treasure all sorts of different things: house, cars, investments, clothes, another person, a sports team, reputation, a country, appearance, etc.

19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

Jesus has us consider the relative security of treasures in heaven and treasures on earth. Treasuring things on earth really isn't too smart because "treasures on earth" are susceptible to moth and rust. When I was growing up, my mom stored our winter clothes in large cardboard barrels. Before she put the top on the barrel, though, she'd sprinkle in a few moth balls in order to keep the moths from eating holes in our clothes. Clothes are an example of "earthly treasures" that don't last.

Rust can also diminish the value of earthly treasures. "Rust never sleeps" (says the bumper sticker on an old car); under the right conditions, rust can weaken and destroy earthly treasures made out of strong, valuable metals.

Even if moth and rust spare earthly treasures, there are always thieves who can break in and steal. I suspect that the vast majority of us (city dwellers anyway) lock our homes every time we leave because "thieves break in and steal." In Jesus' day homes were typically made of mud bricks; Jesus says literally that thieves "dig through and steal." A pick was really all that a thief needed to get into your house. Jesus is pointing out that earthly treasures don't hold their value and can be completely taken away from you.

In our day we have other types of earthly treasures, but their fate is often the same. Brenda and I bought a brand Honda Accord shortly after we got married; ten years later the body was rusting through and the paint was faded. The "economic downturn" of 2008 revealed how stock and mutual funds can lose their value. Financial planners told their clients that "if you're in the stock market, there is no place to hide" – meaning that virtually every sector of the market was losing value. We could multiply the examples of earthly treasures that are susceptible to decay and loss: real estate, crops, livestock, coins, etc.

Obviously there is nothing wrong with "earthly treasure." There was nothing wrong with clothes and precious metals in Jesus' day. There is nothing wrong with cars and investments in our day. Jesus isn't warning against sinful things here. I don't think Jesus is saying that it's wrong to save; Proverbs 6 would have us look at the ant as an example of hard work and saving for future needs. Jesus isn't implying that we shouldn't enjoy the good things in our lives. In 1 Timothy 4 Paul wrote about enjoying with gratitude the good things that God has created.

So what is Jesus warning against? He says, "Do not lay up for yourself treasures on earth" which are inherently corruptible and which can be lost completely. Instead, Jesus commands His

disciples to “lay up for yourself treasures in heaven” because they’re untouchable. No moth can eat away at these treasures; no rust can destroy them; thieves cannot dig through the walls of heaven and carry away your treasures there. Heavenly treasures are untouchable. There was no economic downturn in heaven in 2008. Every investment you made in the kingdom of heaven during those days was completely safe; no heavenly treasures lost their value.

We “lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven” whenever we invest in the kingdom of heaven. This will involve how we use our money, but it will involve so much more. It will involve our time, our prayers, our gifts, our relationships - really everything. Paul made this point in 1 Timothy 6.

17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.

Paul agrees with Jesus that riches are very uncertain. At the same time he taught that what God supplies should be enjoyed. If we’re honoring God with what He has given us, we don’t have to feel guilty about enjoying it. Scripture advocates finding joy everywhere you possibly can. The irony of materialism is that those who care the most about material things generally enjoy them the least. That’s true if you have a little or a lot.

18 *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,  
19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

Notice how Paul says both to “be rich in good works” *and* “be generous and ready to share.” Those who are “rich in this present world” materially (which by biblical standards includes the vast majority of us) should also be rich in good works. Good works are those things we do out of love for God and love for others. When we are “generous and ready to share” our material goods to meet needs, we prove that we love God more than our earthly treasures. We demonstrate that we understand that the things God entrusts to us are meant to honor Him. Verse 19 stresses what Jesus stressed in the SoM – namely that we can “store up treasures” in heaven, treasures that are compatible with our life in the kingdom.

Back to Matthew 6. . . Verse 21 tells us why this discussion about treasures is so critical:

21 for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

The two are inseparable. If you find what a person treasures the most, you will find that person’s heart. This is a critical issue because God wants your heart. He wants you to love Him with *all* your heart, soul, mind, and strength. In the Bible you *heart* is the command and control center of your life. We live from the heart. Our hearts guide/direct our entire life. That’s why we’re commanded, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life” (Proverbs 4:23).

Ask yourself the question, “What do I treasure the most? Do I treasure earthly things or heavenly things?” To answer that question, look at your life – how you actually live. You answer that question by evaluating how you use your money, your time, and your talents. If someone took an objective look at your life, what would s/he conclude it is that you treasure? If

you want to know the condition of your heart, answer that question about what you treasure. Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

You can't tell where a person's treasure is by looking at his/her paycheck. It's possible to make a LOT of money and for your heart to be fully God's and for your "earthly treasures" to be fully at His disposal. And it's possible to make very little money and for your heart to be set on earthly things and for your "earthly treasures" to be unavailable for the Kingdom. What we're talking about here today isn't meant to be used to judge other people. Jesus challenges each of us to examine our own hearts and our own treasures and to respond accordingly.

***Am I single- or double-minded? (6:22-23)*** The imagery Jesus uses in these verses is a bit confusing to us. But I think His point is clear enough. This is what Jesus says:

22 "The lamp of the body is the eye; if therefore your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 "But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

Jesus is making an analogy between a lamp that lights up a room and a person's eyes that give direction to his/her body and life. A lamp would be placed on the table to give light to everything in the room (see Matthew 5:5). If the lamp was good and bright, the room would be full of light. If the lamp was bad and weak, the room would be full of darkness.

"The lamp of the body is the eye." Just as a lamp lights up a room, our eyes allow us to see the world around us. This is true ***literally and physically***. If your eye is good, you can see clearly and negotiate this life well. If your eye is bad, you have a very difficult time in this world. People without sight often manage wonderfully in this life, but it's hard.

This is also true ***metaphorically*** – and this is the point Jesus was making. If your eyes are set on God and His will, your entire life will be full of light. The KJV translates the word "good" as "single" – as in single-minded. If your sights are single-mindedly set on God, you will find light for every single aspect of your life. If your sights are set on the evil things (or even trivial things or selfish things), it affects everything in your life. Your whole life will be full of darkness. Jesus points out that such darkness can be ***great*** in that it's possible to invite an incredible amount of destruction and death into your life when you're fixed on the wrong thing.

These verses suggest that we each ask ourselves the question, "Is my eye clear? Are my sights single-mindedly set on God and His kingdom?" This doesn't mean that the only thing we do is think about God. But it does mean that when we do think about other things (work, possessions, family, recreation, etc.) that we do so in a God-centered way. Paul actually wrote that "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, you should do it for the glory of God." Last week we talked about a "lifestyle of worship." This is the same mindset: everything we do should be done as an expression of devotion to God.

***Am I trying to serve more than one master? (6:24)*** In verse 24 Jesus addresses the foundational issue behind everything he's said so far. Jesus says this:

24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Having two masters is different from having two bosses at two different jobs. A master demands comprehensive loyalty. When Jesus says that if you try to serve two masters you will end up hating the one and loving the other. Jesus used this idiom of hating and loving when He said that you can't be His disciples unless you hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters (Luke 14:26). That expression didn't mean that you need to loathe and despise your family members; it meant that His disciples' love for Him would be so great that their devotion to their family members looked like hatred in comparison. Here in Matthew 6:24 Jesus is saying that if you try to serve two masters, one or the other will eventually have your loyalty. Your affection for one will make your attitude toward the other look like hatred.

The bottom line, Jesus says, is that "You cannot serve God and mammon." Mammon is a transliteration of the Aramaic word for riches or wealth. Since you can only have ultimate loyalty to one master, you can either serve mammon or you can serve God, but not both. Stott points out that if you divide your allegiance between God and mammon, you've really chosen mammon because "God can be served only with an entire and exclusive devotion" (*The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*, pp. 158-159).

Mammon is a harsh master; it really is. It often demands everything and repays you with nothing. Paul pointed out that we leave this life just the way we entered it – with absolutely nothing (in terms of material possessions); you can't take a single thing with you. If you've loved and served mammon, storing up treasures on earth, you'll look back at your life with great sadness and regret.

God, on the other hand, is an amazingly gracious Master. But only for those who willingly submit to Him. Those who grudgingly serve God find everything about Him and about the Christian life to be a pain. But those who genuinely know God through faith in Jesus Christ and willingly submit to Him find Him to be amazingly gracious. They gladly serve God in ways that appear to others to involve extreme sacrifice. When you ask them about it, they will tell you that the sacrifice is completely worth it. The most joyful people I know are those who are serving God with a whole heart . . . and I have in mind some of you here today.

**Conclusion.** Let me close by saying that Jesus isn't challenging us to give God a little bit more of our money and a little bit more of our time and a little bit more of our devotion. When people get married they don't vow to love each other and be faithful to each other 75% of the time. No, people make an exclusive commitment to each other in the marriage covenant. And we enter into an exclusive relationship with God through the covenant in Jesus' blood. God says, "I am the Lord Your God. You shall have no others." And so when Jesus tells us to store up treasures in heaven, to set our eyes single-mindedly on God, and to serve God alone, He is simply calling us to the life that God intended all along.

During our time of response this morning, I'd encourage you to be honest before God and evaluate your own life in light of the questions we've asked today. Perhaps you'd want to invite God to show you one thing – something small or something big – that He wants you to do in response to this message. This teaching of Jesus isn't meant to condemn and demoralize us; Jesus teaching calls us to the type of single-minded devotion to God that is possible by the grace of God.