

## THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

### Lesson 22, chapter 6 Continued 3

We ended last week by discussing Matthew 6 verse 19. Beginning with this verse and on into the first part of chapter 7 Yeshua deals with an array of matters that in modern vocabulary we would probably label as "social issues". And the first one has to do with money, or better, material wealth and how that may affect our relationship with God.

Before we go any further let's re-read a few verses. Open your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6.

#### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 6:19 - 24**

Because Yeshua is dealing with social matters we need to keep our understanding of them in the context of what this meant to 1st century Jewish society. The good news is that the general principles He is teaching are easily transferred across time and culture and can be applied anywhere and anytime. The first instruction speaks of how a follower of Christ ought to approach the matter of wealth accumulation and how to use it.

It is important to note that nowhere does Yeshua condemn wealth. Instead the issues are 1) how much of our life should we focus on building up material wealth, and 2) what we are to do with what we acquire. Therefore the command is not that we should renounce material possessions. Rather it is more the "treasure" that we should approach with a healthy suspicion. Treasure means the accumulation of that which is most valuable to us; not the mere the mere possession of things, many of which are necessarily and reasonable for living a civilized life. Picture the mythical Midas laying upon, and luxuriating in, his pile of

gold. His life was entirely focused on the accumulation of money simply for the sake of having it and glorying in it.

Many years ago when I was operating in the corporate world I knew a few folks who had made, and were making, considerable money through owning Hi Tech companies and/or through running them. One of them was a close friend and one day we were talking about wealth and the purpose for working so hard to get it. He said that as for himself, the wealth he was accumulating was his score card. It was his score card that measured his success not only in achieving his personal goals but also it measured his success relative to others. Indeed, for him wealth accumulation required a score card. I think this is a pretty good example of what Jesus is talking about as precisely NOT the way His followers are to approach the issue of material wealth. Our wealth should never be the score card of our life. Rather, we are to focus our efforts, and to measure the success of our earthly life, on how much wealth we accumulate in Heaven.

We discussed storing up wealth (or better, treasure) in Heaven last time however I want to briefly remind you what was said because I think it is important for all Believers to gain such a mindset in a real, tangible way so that we can actually know when we're doing it..... or not doing it. The question then is: how, exactly, does one store up our treasure in Heaven? The ancient Jews often equated Heaven with a Treasury, and called the treasures stored there "the treasures of life". Obviously since Heaven is a spiritual and eternal place, the ancient Jews couldn't, and we can't, store material treasure there. Gold, silver, precious jewels, barns full of produce, herds of animals, fine clothing, and more cannot be present in Heaven because it is a spiritual place and not a physical one. So what are Heavenly treasures and how do we accumulate them while we're alive and on earth? Matthew 23:23 provides the answer. It is our righteous deeds during our lifetime that produce Heavenly treasure. By God's definition and viewpoint that righteous treasure consists of our acts of mercy, justice, and trust (trust meaning sincere faith in God). Mercy, justice and trust are to be more than fine ideas that form a moral philosophy of life. These are not only to be our motivating force and intent in all that we do (our inward qualities); but rather we are also to physically and tangibly act out these ideas, motives and intents through our works and deeds (our outward behavior). The poorest humans having the least material wealth can think in terms of, and do deeds of, mercy, justice and trust. So even in our acquisition of material wealth, it can and must be done within the bounds of mercy, justice and trust. Fair play in our business dealings whether with our neighbors, clients or our customers must be a constant. Showing compassion to

those whom we may be in a position to take advantage of due to our situation or status must always be considered. Paying a fair wage even though we might be able to hire someone who is desperate for income for much less than we otherwise might, displays the proper motivation for acquisition of Heavenly wealth. These are just a few everyday examples of our operating in mercy, justice, and trust. Thus ironically, Heavenly treasure consists of our physical actions on earth, which are of a type that produce spiritual treasure in Heaven as a byproduct.

And the really great news is, says Christ, that while the material treasure that one accumulates on earth is not bad or wrong, it is inevitably subject to rot, loss or destruction; but the Heavenly treasure we store up is safe and secure and it stores without deterioration or loss of value for an eternity. Next Jesus gives us the bottom line of what the purpose is behind this wealth principle. Verse 20 says: **"For where your wealth is, there your heart will be also"**. Recall that in that era the heart organ was believed to be where the mind operated. The heart was thought to be the place of rational thinking, and also where our human will resided. Thus a better way to state this verse in modern English terms is, "For where your wealth is, there your **mind** will be also". So Yeshua's statement is not an issue of where our emotional focus is; it is an issue of where our thinking, the passion of our will, and our intellectual focus lies. Yeshua makes it somewhat of a zero sum game. All of us have only so much mental energy and time to give and use. So which ever path we choose automatically means that for every measure of time and energy the one endeavor receives, the other gets an equal amount LESS of our time and energy. It's like a teeter-totter. If one end is up, the other must be down.

Verse 22 sounds as though Christ is opening up another issue, but in fact what He says has everything to do with what we just discussed: money and wealth. It begins with the famous words: "The eye is the lamp of the body". Some call this and what follows a parable. Maybe from the modern definition of a parable it is, but it was not from the 1st century Jewish standpoint. And as we get to Yeshua's first parable as listed in Matthew, we'll get deeply into what a parable is, its intended use, and how we need to understand biblical parables in our time.

This statement that "the eye is the lamp of the body" deserves a great deal of our attention because the way it is nearly universally taught in Christendom has nothing to do with what it meant to the people Yeshua was talking to. The way it is taught from most pulpits is that the meaning is that the eye acts as a portal, a

gateway, a channel that guides what we see.... that is the light comes from an external source and then into the body... and into the brain. Why do we think that? Because in fact, from a medical standpoint, it is true. The eye is an amazing organ that takes light that enters into it in the form of shapes and hues and textures and various intensities and converts that light into millions of miniscule electrical impulses, which are then sent along the optical nerve into the Thalamus and from there it is distributed into the special parts and lobes of our brain that were designed to process those signals and turn them into meaning. So it is kind of like a cable goes between the eye that operates like a camera and then connects it to the brain that operates like a TV. Yet the eye (our camera) can only process what is taken in from the outside world; it can't create its own images. However the ancient world knew nothing of this biological process. They didn't know what the brain did. They didn't know how eyes functioned. Generally speaking such scientific knowledge, even in its most primitive understanding, wasn't known until around 1500 A.D.

So then what did that statement about the eye being the lamp of the body mean to those Jews sitting before Yeshua in the hills above the Sea of Galilee who didn't think of it the way we do? Because whatever it meant to them is exactly how Christ intended it to mean to everyone in all eras, including to us, today. I'll say up front that because ancient Jewish expressions and their meanings are so distant and unknown within modern Western culture that what I'm about to explain to you will sound a bit complicated. First know that the statement of "the eye is the lamp of the body" isn't found in the Old Testament (which was the Bible of the Jews in Yeshua's time) and so it was apparently only a well known expression at least within Jewish society. Rather it is that in that day the eye was regularly compared with a lamp, in a sense that a lamp produces its own light. Thus part of that ancient idea is that (unlike how we might think of it) the eye doesn't take in light, it produces light. We find this same concept in the Old Testament and in other ancient Jewish manuscripts.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Daniel 10:6** *His body was like beryl, his face looked like lightning and his eyes like fiery torches;*

The Apostle John used the same description about the eye in His Apocalypse.

<sup>CJB</sup> **Revelation 1:14** *His head and hair were as white as snow-white wool, his eyes like a fiery flame,*

Here's how we should think about this. Does a lamp give off light, or does it take in light? Of course; it gives off light. But it doesn't always. A lamp is a device then when it has fuel in it and when the wick that becomes soaked with that fuel is lit, then it emits light. However that light can be extinguished and so the lamp goes dark.... even though the lamp itself continues to exist. So in Jesus's sermon what is it that He says determines the status of that lamp ("the eye is the lamp of the body")? That is, does the lamp create light in the eye, or does the lamp NOT produce light and thus the lamp remains dark? That is the subject of the last half of verse 22 and all of verse 23.

The last half of verse 22 says: "So if you have a good eye your whole body will be full of light". In Jewish expression a "good eye" meant to be generous with your money or material things. On the other hand, as it says in verse 24, "but if you have an evil eye, your whole body will be full of darkness". An evil eye meant to be stingy with your money or material things. Thus from the ancient Jewish perspective it is that the eye operates as a lamp in the sense of it being an indicator of the inner moral condition of the person. When the lamp of the eye is lit and emitting light, it indicates a generous person. A generous person in God's economy displays mercy, justice and trust. But when the lamp of the eye is dark (not lit) and so it is NOT emitting light, then it indicates a stingy person and this stinginess indicates an immoral lack of mercy, justice, and trust. Thus verses 22 and 23 together form a word play that integrates two well known Jewish expressions into one profound thought. Let me be clear: the eye and the lamp are used as metaphors. That is, there is no suggestion that one can peer into another person's eye and see an actual light from a lamp or on the other hand see that there is no light coming from a darkened lamp. Nor can one person look into another person's literal eye and judge from its appearance whether that person is generous or stingy.

Professors Davies and Allison liken Christ's statement to a riddle that can be understood on two levels. I entirely agree with that claim ; however I would label those two levels as the **P'shat** (the simplest sense) and the **Remez**, a hint at something deeper. The **P'shat** sense of it is this: "the eye is the lamp of the body" was a kind of common Jewish proverb. If one's eye is good (to a Jew that meant they were generous), then it indicates that this person is operating in the proper spirit of life on earth by loving their fellow man as they love themselves and demonstrating that by sharing their wealth and treasures with others. But if one's eye is evil (to a Jew that meant they were stingy), then it indicates that this person is NOT operating in the proper spirit of life on earth and they do NOT love

their fellow man as they love themselves, as demonstrated by NOT sharing their wealth and treasures with others. Obviously Christ is saying to be generous with whatever material wealth you have.

But in the **Remez** sense of it, it is speaking of a higher spiritual truth. It is that a person with a good eye not only is operating within the moral standard of loving one's fellow man as much they love themselves, but is also operating in a righteous manner that pleases God and so it matters greatly in the spiritual eternity that comes after we die. It will have a definite role in determining our place within the societal structure of God's eternal Kingdom. Conversely; a person with an evil eye not only is operating immorally and is not carrying out God's Torah commandment of loving one's fellow man as much as they love themselves by refusing to share their wealth and treasure with others, but they are also jeopardizing and lowering their place within the societal structure of God's eternal Kingdom. So our generosity or stinginess with whatever little or much wealth we accumulate on earth will be a prime determining factor (among other things) in our status in our spiritual eternity.

In verse 24 Christ sort of sums up what His teaching on money, treasure, and material wealth means. In another of His most famous sayings He says:

**<sup>CJB</sup> Matthew 6:24** *No one can be slave to two masters; for he will either hate the first and love the second, or scorn the second and be loyal to the first. You can't be a slave to both God and money.*

Or as we more commonly hear it (as in the King James Version):

**<sup>KJV</sup> Matthew 6:24** *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*

Before we can discuss this passage, we need to make a decision concerning the final word of verse 24, which is "money" in the CJB and "mammon" in the KJV. The reason we need to contemplate this is that most Christians consider the word "money" to be generally a neutral term (it is neither good nor evil), but the word "mammon" to be a decidedly negative term (it is evil). The Greek word that is being translated is ***mammonas***. This word was borrowed from an Aramaic word ***mamon*** that meant wealth, but more in the sense of meaning profit. Early Latin borrowed the word from the Greek and pronounced it as ***mammona***, which



simply meant wealth. It was used this way in the Latin Vulgate Bible, which was based on the works by the Early Church Father Jerome late in the 4th century. It is at this point that within the early gentile Church the term seems to have taken on a negative, even evil, sense. Up to that time the word was a rather neutral and generic term that meant money, or wealth, or the profit made from business dealings with no stigma as to its rightness or wrongness.

So right at the start of the 5th century we find that within the Christian Church the Latin *mammona* (later borrowed by the English language and made into the term mammon) morphed into something that is bad and is to be avoided. But in Christ's era and for a few centuries afterward, it indicated nothing bad at all. It was just a word that meant money or wealth in all its forms and amounts. What does that mean for us? First it means we have to adjust our thinking. Therefore the CJB version that uses the term "money" is better than those versions that translate the word as "mammon". Although in the end, the idea from Christ's day is closer to meaning material wealth in whatever form, provided we understand that even the term wealth doesn't always mean rich. It means the value of an object or a labor. The main point being that Yeshua was not at all indicating that material things or even abundant material wealth was bad.

In Luke 16, the same statement was recorded with exactly the same words. So we can take Yeshua's statement about God and wealth as authentic and not reworded at some point in history. Let us remember that the context for this instruction of Jesus began at verse 19, and so it is all part of His lesson about how a follower of His ought to view money, especially if it is "treasure". So far He has fashioned His lesson on the matter about how we are to treat it in view of our relationship with other humans. Now in verse 24 He switches to how we are to treat money in view of our relationship with God. Thus He frames money and God as the two possible masters of our life, and says we must choose between them. So considering what He has said in the previous couple of verses it comes down to this: those who are generous on earth are also storing up treasures in Heaven and thus is evidence that they have chosen God as their master. Those who are stingy on earth are only storing up treasures on earth, and none in Heaven, and thus have chosen money and wealth as their master.

Just as in the previous chapter (chapter 5) in verses 17 - 19 when Yeshua is making a statement in which He is anticipating objections or accusations (at least from some in the crowd) about what He is soon going to say, here in Matthew 6:24 He seems to also anticipate some push back. Since He is saying it is

impossible to serve two masters, He knows that some will say: "Sure you can!" I can work hard with all my time and focus to gather wealth at the same time I'm working hard to follow God. In modern colloquial terms: hey, I can walk and chew gum at the same time! But Yeshua says that because of human nature, we only have the human capacity to love the one master and hate the other. Let me remind you that in the Bible love and hate really aren't quite like we think of those terms in the 21st century. Love and hate to us express the extremes of our emotions. But in Yeshua's day to love and hate were what we can justifiably call "political terms". That is, to love your master (your king or your governor or even the person to whom you were in servitude, for example) means to give them your sincere loyalty. To hate your master means to be disloyal to them. So it is my opinion that in modern times in modern English, the better way to say what Christ was getting at is: "You cannot be a slave to two masters: for you will be loyal to the one and disloyal to the other....." Thus for the person who believes that they can focus day and night upon wealth building, basing nearly every decision they make around that goal; but at the same time claim they are all in for serving God, it cannot be so even if they want it to be so. Christianity sometimes calls this straddling the fence; one foot in the world of acquiring material wealth, the other foot in the world of serving God.

Again: this is not Yeshua speaking against material gain. It is that it must always be secondary to our focus and relationship with God. Yeshua not only means that we cannot serve two masters well; it is that it is impossible to serve two masters the way a master must be served. Frankly such a notion of serving two masters is almost an oxymoron. If one is your master, then by definition you cannot have a second one or NEITHER is your master. Instead YOU are trying to be master of all. Today, in the prosperous West, it is not easy to figure out how to balance money and wealth acquisition with serving God. We tend to go to extremes. Some people decide that having more than their basic needs met is wrong and not Godly and so look at those who have wealth as automatically godless and wicked. Others think that if you profess Christianity that God automatically wants you to be abundantly wealthy. The wrong-minded Prosperity Doctrine came from this mindset. It really revolves around the idea of the existence of a divine score card. That is, as a Christian the more material wealth you accumulate indicates a greater faith in God, and so this wealth can be seen as your visible reward from God for your faithfulness. The reality is that this is just a way to spin this passage so that we can violate its underlying principle: you can't have it both ways. From God's perspective you can't give all your loyalty to both the accumulation of wealth and service to Him. Choose.



This is a good time to make brief mention about what a modern Believer ought to do with the wealth we have accumulated, however little or large. The top of the list always is: give. Give. Be merciful. Be obedient. But ultimately, be generous both in mind and in behavior. Giving grudgingly or even mechanically is worth less than not giving at all, because motive and intent is what the Lord is looking for above all else. Having the motive and intent but never quite getting around to doing what you know you should do is just as wrong. There are people all around us that need help, and ministries that you are no doubt associated with that need to be funded in order to carry out the commission they've been given. Holding back when you could give, and should give, is (according to Christ) to your personal eternal detriment. Enough said.

So I want to move on to verse 25 but I want to leave you with this thought about wealth and our relationship with the Lord. First, we do NOT find Christ developing new rules about wealth. Yeshua Himself regularly relied on the hospitality of others in His own ministry. In fact, for doing so He was one time called a glutton and another a drunkard!

<sup>CJB</sup> **Luke 7:34 *The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'Aha! A glutton and a drunkard! A friend of tax-collectors and sinners!'***

Second, Christ doesn't even cry out against the current economic system of His day that had created so few rich and so many poor. That's because the issue is not wealth itself; for Him the issue is its proper use. Because wealth and money is such a huge part of life for all of us, but especially for Westerners, I want to quote something Martin Hengel said that well captures the essence of Yeshua's position on the matter.

***"Jesus was not interested in any new theories about the rightness and wrongness of possessions in themselves, (or) about the origin of property or its better distribution. Rather He adopted the same scandalously free and untrammled attitude to property as to the powers of the state; the alien Roman rule and its Jewish confederates. The imminence of the Kingdom of God robs all these things of their power....."***

In other words, as with everything that Jesus has so far instructed in His Sermon on the Mount, there is nothing new here. Rather He is stating all the old tried and true laws, regulations, and common virtues known for centuries in Hebrew society, but now they are to be thought of, and acted upon, within the new reality

of the sudden arrival of the Kingdom of God. We, too, must look at all things in the Bible and all things in our lives, in light of the ever expanding reality of the Kingdom of God that is here....now..... including the certainty of the end of all things and the soon return to earth of the Kingdom's ruler: Yeshua. The Son of God. What does our wealth mean, and what ought to be its purpose, when we have that knowledge and we think of it that way? Let's read a little more in Matthew 6.

### **RE-READ MATTHEW CHAPTER 6:25 - end**

Verse 25 begins with what we could rightly call a Proverb of Yeshua. It is: "Therefore, I tell you, don't worry about your life....." Words like this impress and imprint on the lives of some, but fly over the heads of others. For whatever reason, the Apostle Peter took them to heart.

<sup>CJB</sup> **1 Peter 5:7** *Throw all your anxieties upon him, because he cares about you.*

The idea of trusting God for all the provisions of life was well embedded in ancient Hebrew society. I spoke earlier that more than once in His sermon Yeshua expected there to be murmurings and objections to the some of the things He said. Thus beginning in verse 25 Christ answers the question that so many in the large crowd would have inwardly thought or expressed out loud. In fact, if you've been paying attention, maybe some of you are asking this question right now. So if I'm to spend all my time and energy serving God, then how am I supposed to provide for me and for my family? Can I really ever be completely indifferent to the need and want of money and material things, even including such basics as food and clothing?

I mentioned at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel that he sees Yeshua as a sort of 2nd Moses, and in many ways Christ is re-living the life of Moses. Thus as we read those final verses of chapter 6 we don't find Yeshua solving the rhetorical riddle I just asked. Rather, like Moses as the people gathered in Egypt for the Wilderness Journey, and he doesn't tell the people how they'll be provided for all during that time of their journey, neither does Yeshua provide all the answers as to how we can serve God with all of our focus and loyalty, and at the same time acquire the provisions we are bound to need to sustain life. Rather both Moses and Jesus simply say: follow me. Then the people either believe and trust, or they don't.

When Yeshua compares the value of life to eat and drink, and the body to clothing, and the need of food to the toil of planting and harvesting, He in no way is suggesting that we all ought to become lazy or in some kind of warped sense of being provided for just lay around and wait for God to supernaturally feed, house and clothe us. Rather Christ is acknowledging that nothing is more human than to worry about money. I've known a few rich people who just might worry more about money than people who have little. So this is proof in itself that harboring anxiety about these things doesn't move us one inch closer to solving the problem of worry in our lives. Only faith in the Lord can be the balm that soothes and calms. So what I'm saying is that this question falls in line with the choice we were given about choosing our master whether it be money or God. The choice is: shall we let worry and anxiety be our master, or shall we let our faith in God be the ruler of our thoughts? As with money and God, there is no halfway, one foot in and one foot out approach that is workable. Choose: personal anxieties about our needs, or faith in God.

Let's understand: having food, clothing, and something to drink are generally a given to most of Western society in our time (of course acknowledging that there are those who fall outside that generality). But in Christ's day it was these things that were the greatest every day sources of worry and anxiety for Jews. Today we worry a lot about what disease we might catch. About the value of stocks and our 401K. Whether we'll get a good raise at work or if the cost of Health insurance will become unaffordable for us. These are all things that to us seem reasonable to be concerned about. So the underlying subject of these final verses of chapter 6 are not really so much about food, drink and clothing; rather they are about faith in God as the antidote for worry. Every era, and every person, has various legitimate things that we could be anxious about. But in every era trusting God is our best hope for inner peace no matter what circumstance might arise.

Notice how Christ uses examples from nature to make His point. The idea of comprehending great spiritual truths from observing physical, natural creatures is found all throughout the Bible. C.H. Dodd puts it this way:

***"(Jesus) held the conviction that there is no mere analogy, but (rather) an inward affinity, between the natural order and the spiritual order. Or as we might put it in the language of the Parables themselves, the Kingdom of God is intrinsically like the process of nature. Since nature and super-nature are one order, you can take part of that order and find illumination***

***for the other parts".***

That is, the natural kingdom and the spiritual kingdom aren't so much similar as they are actually cut from the same cloth because they are equally produced and watched carefully over by the same loving Creator. So Yeshua's use of birds and plants (flowers) to compare to human life and our needs aren't far fetched or mere rhetoric. One explains the other.

But there is one thing that isn't the same: the value of birds and plants versus the value of human life. Here Yeshua uses standard Jewish (even Rabbinic) logic and argument. He uses the principle of ***Kal V'chomer***. The principle of light versus heavy. This principle is used in philosophy to compare items A and B under certain circumstances. So if A is true, then B must be so much more. In this case, since God has so much concern for humanity that He has sent His Son to die for us, won't He then give to us what we need in such greater proportion than He does to care for birds and plants? The answer to a ***Kal V'chomer*** question lies within the structure of the question itself. And the answer to Christ's question is: of course God will give more care to humans made in His image than to birds and plants who are already wonderfully cared for.

At the end of verse 27 Yeshua follows up that question with yet another. "Can any of you, by worrying, add a single hour to his life?" Let me say this in another way: Worrying is foolish and accomplishes nothing. Not only does it not add to your longevity, it takes away from it. So why do it? Worrying is the epitome of doing something inherently unproductive or even destructive. So the obvious answer to His question is: "no". Does any human being, Jew or gentile, believe that worrying helps matters? Or that anxiety is the key to a long life span? So if we inherently know the answer to that, why do we keep doing it; seemingly helpless to stop it? The answer is at the end of verse 30: "What little trust you have". Ouch! Two verses later Jesus says that having little trust, which brings on great anxiety, is what pagans experience because they set their hearts on "all these things". What things? Literally food, clothing, and drink. But these items are merely representative of the all the material needs humans have or desire. And pagans experience worry, says Yeshua, because this is what they set their hearts on. In other words, money and material possessions is inherently the master of pagans, and the result is the never fully satisfied want of them. But, if God is our master, then as verse 33 says: "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things (our material needs) will be given to you."

Believers seem to readily notice the part where it says to seek His Kingdom. But often the "and His righteousness" part seems to sail by unnoticed. Remember what we have learned in the past: God's righteousness is His will to save. So seeking His righteousness means to seek Salvation. His Kingdom and His Salvation are organically connected. His Kingdom is the realm of the saved, and only of the saved. And the only channel to salvation lies in God's Son, Yeshua. So once again, we see Christ NOT saying: seek only God and have no interest in acquiring provisions for you and your family. Rather this is yet another statement about priorities. We need God's salvation and we also need sustenance and provision. But FIRST and with the most energy, and above all else, we need to seek God's Kingdom and the salvation He offers.

Thus, since worry is always about our physical, material and earthly wants and needs (which are always to be secondary to our spiritual relationship with God), then stop worrying about these things and especially about the future. You can't control, amend, or stop the future. This doesn't mean not to plan or to be indifferent to your obvious needs. This is talking about fruitless anxiety; obsessing and fretting about things as opposed to planning a way to improve your circumstances in concert with fullest trust in God as your master. Because whatever God wills, ordains, or allows is inevitable.

We'll begin chapter 7 next time.