

## **WALKING WITH JESUS - PART 7**

### **Out of Focus**

**Dr. Derek Morris**

Preaching passage:	Matthew 6:19-24
Subject:	How a person will live who serves God rather than earthly riches
Complement:	lay up treasure in heaven rather than on earth.
Exegetical idea:	When a person serves God rather than riches, he/she will lay up treasure in heaven rather than treasure on earth.
Homiletical idea:	<b>If you're serving God rather than the things of this world, you'll be focused on laying up treasure in heaven rather amassing more and more treasure on earth.</b>
Purpose:	To encourage my hearers to focus on wants God wants for their lives: serving Him and laying up treasure in heaven.

I brought some pictures to show you from my recent trip to India. They're all on this tiny thumb drive. Amazing! Modern technology! I'm not much of a photographer, but this new digital camera makes taking pictures a lot easier! They could almost market this model as a "Camera for Dummies!" But I'm not sure if the marketing slogan would work too well!

If you take a picture with this camera and it's all blurry and out of focus, no one ever needs to know. You can just delete it! Only print the good ones!

Do some of you more mature listeners remember the days when you would get your pictures back from Kodak, or wherever you mailed them, and you quickly scanned them to see which ones came out well and which ones were out of focus? Nobody wants to look at a picture that is out of focus. It's almost worse than no picture at all. Isn't it?

But I'm here to tell you today that there is something worse than a picture that is out of focus. Something much more serious. It's a life that is out of focus. Jesus addresses the problem of a life being out of focus in the portion of His great sermon on the mount that we are going to study today.



And Jesus gives us 3 reasons why we should not let earthly treasures be the focus of our lives. The first two reasons are found in Matthew 6:19 and repeated in Matthew 6:20. The third and most important reason why we should not let earthly riches be the focus of our lives found in Matthew 6:21.

Let's read Matthew 6:19 again. "....." Earthly treasures are transitory. They can pass away. They can be here today and gone tomorrow. One reason why we should not let earthly treasures be the focus of our lives is the fact that moths and rust can destroy those treasures. The verb used here literally means to cause them to disappear. If Jesus was speaking today here in Florida, he might have said, "Termites and rust and corrupt corporate executives can cause your earthly treasures to disappear"! If you allow the amassing of more and more earthly treasures to be the focus of your life, you are going to be sorely disappointed.

And there's a second reason that we should not allow earthly treasures to be the focus of our lives, and that's found at the end of Matthew 6:19. Thieves can break in and steal your earthly treasures. The Greek word for thief is  $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\nu\theta\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha$  and the verb "to steal" is  $\lambda\acute{\omicron}\nu\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega$  from which we get the English word kleptomaniac! They had them back then and we still have them today. You work hard for things and then kleptomaniacs steal them from you! Those thieves may not want your earthly treasure at all, but they want the money or the power that it can bring them.

My wife today me yesterday that there has been a series of robberies recently at self-storage facilities. Stealing the earthly treasures that wouldn't even fit in people's houses! In one storage unit, the thieves found a bag that contained \$30,000 in cash. I'm not sure what a bag of cash was doing in a self-storage unit, though I have my suspicions. Maybe all of the closets at

home were already full! But whatever the reason, the bag of cash was taken, along with many other items from other storage units by a young band of kleptomaniacs. These young men didn't need everything that they were taking. But they had become addicted to amassing more and more treasure. Their lives were out of focus, just like many of the people that they were robbing from.

If amassing more and more earthly treasure is the focus on your life, you'll be heart-broken when moths or rust or corrupt corporate executives cause those treasures to disappear or when thieves take those treasures away from you. So don't continually focus on amassing treasure on earth. That's what Jesus says. Because moths and rust and corrupt corporate executives can cause your treasures to disappear, and thieves can steal your earthly treasures.

But the third and most important reason why we should not let amassing earthly treasures be the focus of our lives is found in Matthew 6:21. Let's read the words of Jesus together.

“.....”

Some months ago, an individual made a generous donation so that we could film our Life and Teachings of Jesus class for Hope TV. I have received several e-mails this week from around the world from individuals and groups who are using those materials to learn more about Jesus! Is the individual who gave that initial donation staying awake at night worried if that investment will be fruitful? Not at all. Is that individual worried whether that money donated will disappear or be stolen. No. That treasure has been laid up in heaven. When you lay up treasure in heaven, instead of worrying about losing it, you'll be looking forward to finding out what a difference that investment has made in the lives of hundreds of people around the world!

Some of you invested in helping Emmanuela to go as a missionary to West Africa. I

doubt if you're that God will keep your money safe. You're praying that God will keep Emmanuela safe. Your heart will be focused on things of eternal value.

It's crucially important as we walk with Jesus to focus on laying up treasure in heaven rather than continually focusing on laying up treasure on earth. Not only can earthly treasure disappear, or be stolen. But where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

But Jesus isn't finished with this topic. Many simply pass over the next verse in Jesus' sermon. I've never heard anyone explain this text before. But I want us to examine the words of Jesus recorded in Matthew 6:22-23. I'm convinced that these words are directly related to what Jesus has just said in Matthew 6:19-21.

Let's read the words of Jesus together, starting with Matthew 6:22.

“.....” What is Jesus trying to tell us here? What does He mean when He says that the lamp of the body is the eye? If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.

I think that Jesus is talking here about focus. If your life is in focus, your whole body will be affected positively. Conversely, if your life is out of focus, your whole body will be affected negatively. Being obsessed with amassing earthly riches isn't simply going to affect the way you distribute your money. It isn't just going to affect the amount that you give or don't give in tithes and offerings. If your life is out of focus in regards to earthly riches versus heavenly riches, other areas of your life will be affected. Your relationships with others will be affected. The way that you spend your time will be affected. The way that you exert your influence over others will be affected. If the eye is good, the whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, if your life is out of focus, your whole body will be full of darkness.

So how do I make sure than my life is in focus, rather than out of focus? How do I make sure that I focus on laying up treasure in heaven rather than being obsessed with laying up treasure on earth? I believe that the answer is found in the final words of Jesus in this part of His sermon, recorded in Matthew 6:24. These words of Jesus are often quoted in isolation from verses 19-23, but the thoughts are related. Let's read Matthew 6:24 together.

“.....”

Do you agree with Jesus that no one can serve two masters? Well, you say, “it depends.” Many of us report to more than one person at work. We may not call them “master” but they have authority over us. They direct our activities. They tell us what to do. But have you ever had to work in a situation where two people who had authority over you didn't agree with each other and they were both trying to tell you what to do? It's an impossible situation. Children can feel that way too when they are caught between two parents who don't agree wit each other.

I believe that is what Jesus has in mind here. No one can serve two masters who are diametrically opposed to each other. You either hate one and love the other. Loyal to one and despise the other. It's just not possible to serve two masters who are diametrically opposed to each other.

And then Jesus concludes: You cannot serve God and mammon. The NIV translates it this way: “You cannot serve both God and Money.” Money, earthly riches, earthly treasure, is not a god. Money is an inanimate object. But it can become a god. It can become the object of your worship. And if that happens, your life is out of focus. And every area of your life will be affected. Every area. If the eye is bad, the whole body will be full of darkness.

So the question that I want to ask you this morning is a simple one: Who are you serving?

I know that you are here in church today. But you are you serving in your life? Is God first in your life? Have you invited God to be Lord of all in your life? If so, you'll be more concerned about laying up treasure in heaven rather than simply amassing treasure on earth. But if you're constantly preoccupied with earthly riches, there's a good chance that your life is out of focus. You're not really serving God at all. Someone or something else has usurped the place at the center of your life that belongs only to God.

I don't want my life to be out of focus. I don't want your life to be out of focus either. And it can easily happen, you know. I want to serve God with my whole heart. Don't you? I want to focus on laying up treasure in heaven rather than just amassing treasure on earth. Don't you?

I did bring a few pictures to show you from my recent trip to India. I want to introduce you to Urmi. Fortunately, this picture is in focus. And Urmi's life is also in focus. Urmi was born into an upper middle class family in India. Her father was a physician. Her mother was a hospital administrator. Urmi had many advantages and could have spent her whole life becoming more and more affluent.

But Urmi decided to devote her life to something more than laying up treasure on earth. After completing an undergraduate degree in social work and a graduate degree in criminology, Urmi decided to start a special ministry in the city of Calcutta. She noticed that there were many children of sex workers wandering around in the red light district of Calcutta. No one seemed to care about these children. So Urmi found an upstairs room at the end of a dark alley in the red light district in Calcutta and she started a ministry for the children of sex workers. At 5:00 PM every evening, when their mothers are about to start their work, these children don't have to

wander the dark and dangerous alleys. They can come to that upper room. Urmi and her helpers bathe the children, feed them, and help them with their homework. About 90 children are enrolled in that program. Urmi calls that ministry New Life. And it really does bring new life to those children!

But that's not all that Urmi is doing. She just started another ministry for young girls. The red light district of Calcutta is not a safe place for those young girls to grow up. God touched the heart of a donor to send Urmi the money to purchase a 3-story building in a better neighborhood of Calcutta. Urmi named that home for girls Shoma House. It is currently home for 16 girls, ages 7-16. All are children of sex workers from the red light district. The oldest girl at Shoma House is about to finish high school. She wants to become a police officer! And she's an inspiration to the 15 younger girls at the home. One of the younger girls recited a poem for us. Her mother is a sex worker who is dying of AIDS. These two girls are sisters. They were rescued just days before they would have ended up in the quicksand where their mother lives and works.

God is using Urmi and her team to make a difference in the city of Calcutta. And my life was blessed as I witnessed first-hand what God was doing through them. I had the privilege of praying a blessing for Urmi last Sabbath afternoon. She is a living example of serving God with all your heart. She is not be obsessed with simply amassing more and more earthly treasure. She is laying up treasure in heaven.

I also visited some literacy projects that our sponsored by our church here in North America. This literacy project is located in Tamil Nadu, in southwest India. Do you see the young lady with the green top. I don't even know her name. But she shared her story, and there



was a beautiful smile on her face. She grew up in a fishing village. She was illiterate. No one wanted to marry her. But her life changed when she decided to participate in a literacy group conducted by a Seventh-day Adventist woman in her village. Typically, about 20 individuals attend each program, which meets 2 hours every evening, 5 days per week. The students attend at no charge. They learn how to read, and how to do basic math.

This young lady was smiling because she not only found a husband. She can help her husband to sell his fish at the market, without getting cheated. She can buy items at the market and is able to count the change. She can also read and sign her name. And because the materials are Bible based, this young lady also learned about Jesus. Today, she is the treasurer of the little Adventist group in her village. Do you see the book that she is holding in her hand? That's a Bible in the Tamil language. With a smile on her face, she read to me Psalm 23—The Lord is my shepherd.

And all that was possible because some people back in North America believe in laying up treasure in heaven, and because that young lady's teacher was willing to use her limited gifts and talents not just to amass more and more earthly treasure but to lay up treasure in heaven.

I asked this young lady why she is a facilitator of a literacy project that meets in her home. She has a profession as a lab technician at a hospital. She is more affluent than many of the laborers that she teaches. So why does she work all day and then devote two hours every evening, Sunday through Thursday to help Hindus, Moslems and Christians to learn how to read and do basic maths. Do you know what she told me? "I believe that it's something God wants me to do." That young lady is serving God. Her life is in focus. She is laying up treasure in heaven.

I had to show you this final picture. This literacy student is so proud of learning how to read, she decided to teach me Hindi. She is laughing because I'm illiterate and I'm not a very quick learner. I'm laughing because I can see so many changed lives. The head elder of this little Adventist church in eastern India has been elected as the president of the 13 villages of that region. That little church is making a difference. Their material possessions are limited. Their church is simple and unadorned. But they are serving God with their whole hearts and they are laying up treasure in heaven.

I'm not suggesting this morning that we should all move to India and start a ministry for the children of sex workers or run literacy projects. But I am asking you to take a look at your life today. Take a look at your priorities. Is your life in focus or out of focus? Are you serving God with all of your heart and all of your strength? Or are you a slave to earthly treasure?

Now I want to invite you to bow your head in prayer and ask God to show you how He wants you to serve Him with all of your strength. Ask God to show you how He wants you to lay up treasure in heaven.

Let's take a moment now to pray and listen.

Lord, thank you for speaking to us today. Now help us to do what You ask us to do.  
Amen.

## Children's story:

### Taking pictures

How many of you boys and girls like to take pictures with a camera? Do anyone have your own camera or do you borrow a camera from your mommy or daddy? When I was a little boy, cameras were bigger and more complicated than this one. You had to make sure that enough light was coming into the lense of the camera or else that picture would be too bright or too dark. And you had to adjust the lense to make sure that the picture was in focus.

Have you ever sense a picture that is out of focus? It's all blurry. It doesn't look good at all. This camera is supposed to be auto-focus. That means that every picture is supposed to be clear and in focus. But I've discovered that your pictures can still be out of focus.

If I'm focusing on a bad book or a bad video game and then I turn and take a quick picture of Jesus, Jesus is all blurry. My picture of Jesus is all out of focus.

But if I'm focusing on Jesus, if I'm directing my attention toward Jesus, and a bad book or a bad video game gets in the picture, then the bad book is all blurry and my picture of Jesus is still in focus.

There was a little song that some of us learned when we were little, and the words are still true. It says, Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." The writer could have used these words: " Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely blurry and out of focus, in the light of His glory and grace." That's not quite as easy to sing! But it's just as true. So remember, wherever you are, whatever you're doing, keep thinking about Jesus. He loves you, you know?