

The Sermon on the Mount
The Deadly Dangers of Materialism, Part 3
Matthew 6:19-24

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I invite you to turn to the Sermon on the Mount. We're working our way through our Lord's most famous sermon and we find ourselves in Matthew 6. This week I was reading a little bit about what is the most complicated organ in the human body. It's the eye – smaller than a ping pong ball, and yet it has tens of millions of electrical connections. Your eye can process 1.5 million messages simultaneously. The miracle of human sight begins with the lens, a small sac of fluid the size and shape of an oval vitamin pill on the front surface of your eye, surrounded by a ring of tiny but unbelievably strong muscles. When you look at an object as you are right now, either at me or your Bible or somewhere else, light passes through that lens and brings it into correct focus on your retina. Your retina is a kind of onionskin wallpaper that covers the rear interior of the eye. The retina covers an area less than a square inch, but scientists tell us it has more than 130 million light-sensitive receptor cells in each eye. They estimate 125 million of those light-sensitive receptor cells are shaped like rods for being able to see in black and white, and 7 million of them are shaped like cones for color vision. When light reaches that retina (those receptor cells), an electrochemical process begins. It is an electrochemical bleaching process that generates just the smallest amount of electricity; in fact, just millionths of a volt – not even enough to sting a mosquito. That information that is now in electrical impulses is immediately fed into a straw-size optic nerve at the back of the eye and is transmitted to the optic center of your brain at a speed of about 300 miles an hour. Your brain then interprets those electrical impulses and you see the image in front of your eyes. And that incredible photoelectrical chemical process takes about two thousandths of a second – truly an amazing creation of God. There is no human camera that even comes light years close to the human eye.

Jesus uses the miracle of human sight in our eyes to make a profound spiritual point in the passage that we come to this morning in Matthew 6. Now just to orient you again, beginning in 6:19 and running down through the end of the chapter, our Lord explains how we should think about wealth and possessions. He warns us about the danger of materialism; that is, of preferring material possessions and physical comfort to spiritual values. That's materialism. He explains how to recognize the dangers that come inherent in materialism in verses 19 to 24. And He tells us how to overcome those dangers in verses 25 to 34 (the end of the chapter).

We're looking at just the first section together. Let me read it for you. Matthew 6:19.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”

In these verses, Jesus identifies for us three deadly dangers of materialism. Now, last week, we finished our study of the first deadly danger of materialism found in verses 19 to 21, and we call that the danger of being completely consumed by materialism. The danger is expressed in verse 21: “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Where you invest your resources, your entire inner being will be absorbed there. If you invest your resources here, and that’s where your treasure really is, then your entire inner being will be completely absorbed with material things--with life here on this planet. If, on the other hand, you invest your resources in the kingdom of heaven, then your entire inner being will be consumed not with the things of this planet, but with the kingdom of God--with the spiritual kingdom over which Jesus rules.

Now, today, we want to examine the two other dangers that are inherent in materialism. The second great danger is this: being spiritually blinded by materialism. In verses 22 and 23, Jesus uses a figure of speech that some have even called a parable. It’s probably best to think of it as just a simple metaphor. He uses an example from the physical world to illustrate a spiritual reality. Now notice, first of all, the metaphor itself. It has to do with the relationship between your physical eyes and your physical body. Verse 22 – Jesus says, “The eye is the lamp of the body...” Now He wasn’t saying that your eye is a source of light. Rather because light can only enter your body through your eyes, it’s as if your eyes serve as a lamp providing light for your entire body. The only reason that you see light right now is because of your eyes. Verse 22: “...so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.” Now the Greek word that’s translated *clear* here is a difficult word to really discern the exact meaning, because it occurs only here in the New Testament. It can mean *single* as opposed to *double* –an eye that’s singly focused. It can also mean *sincere* which isn’t likely here. It’s probably best understood as most modern translations (probably the one you’re using this morning) has taken it – and that is either as *clear* or *healthy*. If your eye is like a lamp and it’s clear and healthy, then it allows you to see things as they really are. If it’s functioning properly, then your whole body is full of light; that is, your entire body is able to see the world around you clearly and to respond appropriately. Verse 23: “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.” Jesus is again now speaking at the physical level in terms of your physical eye and your physical body. He says: “If your eye is bad (literally evil; that is, it isn’t functioning properly), then your whole body will be full of darkness.” If your eyes are not functioning as God intended, then you will have some

degree of physical blindness. That's His point. You won't be able to see the world around you as it really is.

Now this is just a simple metaphor. That's the physical picture. But here's the question – what's the spiritual lesson? What does it mean? Jesus was not talking here about your body, but your soul. His primary point is not about the eyes in your head, but the eyes of your heart – your inner perception of what is true and what is spiritual reality. You see, we have physical eyes that connect us to our physical environment, but we also have the mind; and the mind is like an internal eye of sorts that connects us to the moral and spiritual environment. And just as our physical eyes can be healthy and we see things clearly as they are, or diseased and we don't. In the same way our mind's eye can either be clear and we see things as they really are, or obscured and we don't. If your spiritual vision is clear, then your soul is healthy. But if your spiritual perception is clouded and unhealthy, then your perspective of the moral and spiritual world around you will be totally and terribly flawed and skewed as well. Notice the end of verse 23. Here He leaves the physical body and the physical eye and He applies what He's saying: "If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!" There's the danger. If the eyes of your heart which are supposed to give you light (that is, a right perspective on the world around you); if your mind's eye isn't functioning properly, then you can't see spiritual things clearly. And if that's true, then it really is a great darkness. You see, physical blindness is not completely debilitating. We have folks in our church who, through God's providence, struggle with some degree of physical blindness. And it's remarkable how well the other senses sort of pick up the slack, and what they can accomplish without sight. But Jesus says here spiritual blindness is different. It is totally debilitating. If your spiritual vision is clouded and unhealthy, then your soul will experience darkness.

Now that brings us to the question. What causes spiritual blindness? There are a number of causes of physical blindness. What about spiritual blindness? What causes spiritual blindness? Well, there are several reasons we could give. My mind goes to 2 Corinthians 4:4 where Paul says that "the god of this world (*that is, Satan*) has blinded the minds of those who don't believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel should shine unto them." Satan causes spiritual blindness in people so that they don't see the truth. But here in the context of Matthew 6, Jesus has one particular cause of spiritual blindness in mind. Now remember the context. Context is always the key whether you're reading the newspaper or whether you're reading the Bible. What's the context? What's the context here? Well, the verses that come before this are talking about materialism and material things; the verses that come after this, verse 24, talking about material things. So clearly He's still talking about materialism. There's also another clue that's not quite as obvious in English as it is in Greek. There is a word play in the Greek text. Let me explain it to you. You see the word that's translated *clear*? The Greek word that's translated *clear* there can also mean, and is translated in other places as *generous*. And the Greek word that's translated evil, as in a bad eye, is a word that's used to refer to being covetous or envious. In fact, for example, in Proverbs 28:22, we read: "A man with an evil eye (*that is, an eye that's envious,*

that's covetous) hastens after wealth..." In fact, in Matthew 20, you remember the story of the vineyard owner who hires workers at different parts of the day. And when the end of the day comes, he gets ready to pay them all and he pays them all the same thing. The guys who've only worked one hour get the same pay as the guys who worked all day. It's a story of God's salvation – the fact that when He calls people to Himself, they all get salvation whether they live an entire life of righteousness, or whether they get saved at the very end of life and, like the thief on the cross, they're saved at the last moments of life. They all get eternal salvation. They get the same reward. And you remember in the parable though, the ones who got paid the same price for working all day, the same amount for working all day, they complain. And this is what the Lord quotes the landowner saying in Matthew 20:15, "Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye (*literally*) evil because I am generous?" So you see what Jesus is doing here? It's really amazing, because He uses words that can mean a clear or healthy eye and a diseased eye. But the same words can refer to an eye that's generous, that isn't caught up with materialism, or an eye that's covetous that is. So He's talking about materialism. Jesus' point in these two verses is that one of the great causes of spiritual blindness is materialism. It is a deadly danger to your soul, because it will blind you to spiritual realities. And according to the end of verse 23, it will produce a devastating spiritual darkness over your soul. So how does this happen?

How does materialism produce spiritual blindness? Well, there are a number that I discovered in my study, but let me just give you a couple to consider. First of all, materialism can blind you to the value of spiritual things. Jesus makes this very point in Luke 12. Turn there with me. In Luke 12, Jesus is teaching. And in the middle of His teaching, maybe even interrupting Him (Luke 12:13) "Someone in the crowd said to Him, 'Teacher (*Rabbi*), tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.'" Now we're not told the circumstances. We don't know if this was a younger brother, and you remember in that culture the oldest brother got a double portion. Maybe he's just saying, I want to have an equal portion with my older brother. Or maybe the older brother, or the other brother that's discussed here, took it in a way that he shouldn't have taken it, and there was an injustice done. We don't really know. The problem, though, is with this guy's heart. Jesus responds to him (verse 14): "Man (*that's kind of like Mister. It's not real respectful. He's responding to him for this interruption – Mister*), who appointed Me a judge or arbiter over you?" He says, Look. I'm not here to decide petty civil disputes. If you have a problem, take it to the civil courts. Verse 15: "Then He said (*notice this*) to them (*and the implication here is not just to the two brothers but to all who were gathered. Here's the heart issue*) 'Beware (*Jesus says look out for a danger*), and be on your guard against every form of greed (*in this case, wanting a portion of the family inheritance*); for not even when one has an abundance (*when you have more than you need, even then*) your life doesn't consist of what you possess.'" Jesus uses the word for *life* here. It's not the word *bios* speaking of biological life. It's *zoe*. It's a word which speaks of real life. We could say, Listen. Real life isn't made up of what you possess.

And in response to all of this, verse 16, He told them a parable. There was this rich farmer and his land was very productive. Through no fault of his own, or not because of his own hard work – simply because of God’s providence in his life, his land in a year, or maybe several years was extremely productive. And he brings in these bumper crops. “And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’” Apparently he decided that he wouldn’t take that surplus of crops and put it on the market because that would flood the market with grain in his little village. It would lower the price. And so instead he’s going to sit on it until the price is good, and he can gradually let it out and get a maximum return on his investment. Plus he can use it as sort of his investment. Verse 18: “He said, ‘This is what I will do: I’ll tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’” He says, ‘I don’t want to give up more of my land to storage. And so I want to keep the land that’s productive productive. And so I’m just going to use the same spots where I’ve had the barns before. I’ll just tear those down and I’ll build bigger ones so that they will house more grain.’

Verse 19 tells us what’s going on in his heart. Jesus said this is what he said to his soul: “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come (*here is – as our Lord was teaching us not to do—here is a man hoarding his wealth. In addition, he plans to spend it entirely on himself*); take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” Here’s a man who is consumed with materialism. He’s hoarding, he has far more than he needs. And instead of thinking about using those resources for God and His purposes, or for the needy, he’s using it entirely on himself. “But God said to him (*verse 20*), ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you (*you’re going to die today, and then who’s going to get that stuff*); who will own what you have prepared?’” What’s the point? Verse 21: “So is the man who stores up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” Here’s a man who was completely consumed with the material, and that blinded him to the value of spiritual things entirely. And he wasn’t prepared when death came. He never stopped to think, ‘You know, I’m working so hard. I’m doing all this. I may die and I’m not taking one bit of it with me.’ And this is what materialism does to us. It blinds us to the value of spiritual things.

Secondly, it can blind you to the true gospel. Turn to Matthew 13. In Matthew 13, our Lord tells a series of parables about life in His spiritual kingdom. Matthew 13:1. “Jesus went out of the house (*where He was staying in Capernaum, His ministry headquarters*) and He was sitting by the Sea (*of Galilee, originally*).” But large crowds gathered to such an extent that He couldn’t continue to sit there on the side of the sea. He needed to get into a boat so that everyone could see Him and He sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach. And He spoke many things to them in parables. Now the first and most important parable –and frankly if you’ve never studied this parable, let me encourage you to go online. I did a couple messages on this passage in Matthew 13, also in Mark’s version. Go on and listen because if you don’t understand this parable, you don’t understand the rest of Jesus’ parables. And I don’t have time to fully explain it. I just want to show you one thing that He emphasizes here. Verse 3:

Behold, the sower went out to sow; and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty.

Now notice verse 18. Jesus explains: “Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom (*that is, the message about entering the kingdom, the message of salvation, the message of the gospel*)...” So here what you have is: in these soils, you have different kinds of human hearts--different categories of human hearts. He says, Alright. So let Me tell you what the first one is. “Someone hears the message of the gospel, does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom the seed was sown beside the road.” Here’s a person who hears the gospel and he just doesn’t get it – doesn’t connect, doesn’t matter. He yawns. He goes back to whatever he’s distracted with and he moves on. And Christ says Satan comes and, through distraction, removes that message of the gospel so that he doesn’t remember it anymore and it never does anything – lots of people like that. Then He says, verse 20: “The one on whom the seed was sown on the rocky places (*this is where there’s just a thin layer of topsoil and bedrock beneath it – it springs up, looks like the real thing. He says*), this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy (*here’s a guy who looks like he’s becoming a Christian*); yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.” Here’s a person who responds to the message of the gospel and you think, Wow! There’s somebody that the Lord has really saved. And then trouble comes into that person’s life--difficulty, and they’re gone just as quickly.

Verse 22 – here’s where I want us to go: “And the one on whom the seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the message of the gospel, and the worries of the world (*that is, the things that we worry about in this world – careers and mortgages and jobs and homes*) and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” Here again is a person who hears the gospel and their initial response is positive. You look at them and you say, That person became a Christian. But rather than suddenly turning from their profession like the earlier soil does, this just gradually dies away. Here’s a person who hears the gospel. They seem to respond, (and the church is filled with people like this) who over time, the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth (maybe they have it and want to keep it or want more, or they don’t have it and want to get it and that’s what life becomes about,) chokes out the word. And notice the key – it is unfruitful. It becomes unfruitful. Luke says they are choked “and bring no fruit to maturity.” In other words, this never was a real Christian. It looked like he was initially. But over time, these things choked the word. It choked the gospel out. They may still be attending church, may still be making professions of faith as if they belonged to Jesus, but they’re just going

through the motions because the seed died a long time ago. Any love that was apparently there for Christ and His kingdom is long gone. Jesus says, Beware, beware of materialism. It can blind you to the true gospel.

Over a few chapters, in chapter 19, you see this up close and personal with a specific man. Matthew 19:16 – a man who’s called a young ruler. He’s a young man but, even at his young age, he has been elected to be a ruler in his local synagogue--a leader in his local synagogue. He’s a civic leader. He’s wealthy. He owns much property. At a very early age, he’s become a great success. But he realizes he doesn’t have everything he wants. There’s something lacking. Verse 16 – he comes to Jesus and he says, “Rabbi, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life? (He says, ‘*Surely there’s something I can do.*’) Jesus says to him, ‘Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good (*that’s God*)...’ Jesus is saying to him, Look. You think I’m just a human teacher. So if you think I’m just a human teacher, don’t call Me good. Only God is good. And obviously this young ruler has not seen that reality about Jesus yet. But He says to him: “If you wish to enter into life (*if you want eternal life*), keep the commandments.” Now Jesus isn’t teaching salvation by works here. He’s holding up the law to show this guy that he can never obtain eternal life. Remember Galatians 3? “The Law is a tutor to drive us to Christ.” That’s what He’s doing. He’s saying, Look, you want to earn your own way? Okay. Keep God’s Law.’ And this guy thinks he can. Verse 18: “Which ones?” Jesus then quotes five of the six of the second table of the Ten Commandments, the ones that have to do with our relationship to others. He says, “You shall not commit murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness. Honor your father and mother;” (*And then instead of the sixth one, He gives a summary*) You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Now that’s a very indicting list. If you understand the Law at all, and you understand what Jesus is saying, you look at that list and you realize: There’s no way. I could never obtain eternal life by doing those things because I’ve already broken all of them – if not outwardly, at least in my heart. But this guy doesn’t get it. Verse 20: “All these things I have kept (*I’ve done that*); what do I still lack (*tell me something else to do*)?” So Jesus puts His finger on this guy’s problem. And He shows him in just a brilliant statement that he hasn’t kept either table of the Law – the ones about God or the ones about people. He says okay (verse 21): “If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” In one fell swoop, Jesus says, You don’t love your neighbor as yourself because you’re not willing to let go of your stuff to help your neighbor. And He says, You don’t love God because you’re not willing to obey God’s Son and come follow Me. Verse 22: “When the young man heard this statement, he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property. Jesus says to His disciples (*in response to that – the guy walks away and Jesus says*), ‘Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’” By the way, there was no gate in Jerusalem that was called the Needle Gate. Jesus is using hyperbole here. He’s saying, Go ahead. Try to get a real camel through the real eye of a real sewing needle. If you can do that, then a wealthy person can be saved. He was

saying it's impossible. "When the disciples heard this, they were very astonished and said, 'Then who can be saved?'" Remember now, they're coming from a mindset that thinks that if a person's wealthy, that means God has blessed them because He's pleased with them. And so if even the wealthy person can't get in, what hope do the rest of us have? "And looking at them, Jesus said to them, 'With people this is impossible (*that rich person – he's never going to come on his own*), but with God all things are possible.'"

Now why is it hard for a wealthy person to be saved? Scripture says it's because they are tempted to trust in their wealth instead of God. Listen to Psalm 49:6. It speaks of those who trust in their wealth. Psalm 52:7. "Behold, the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches..." 1 Timothy 6:17 – Paul says to Timothy, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God..." Understand that wealth can blind you to the value of spiritual things and it can also blind you to the true gospel, as it did this young man.

Thirdly, it can blind you to its own destructive power. You see, people who are engaged in pursuing wealth--and that's really what life's about, they don't see how destructive that is. Turn over to 1 Timothy 6. I brought this passage to you in another context but I want you to see it again. 1 Timothy 6:9. Paul says:

But those who want to get rich (*if that's your ambition, they*) fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires, (*and sometimes those desires*) plunge men into (*eternal*) ruin and (*eternal*) destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, and some by longing for it have even wandered away from the faith (*there's the thorny ground. There's the person who appears to be in Christ, appears to be the real deal, and the love of money has caused them to wander away from the faith*) and they've pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God..."

You see, wealth deceives. It deceives and causes spiritual blindness so that you don't see the danger. You don't see that wealth doesn't come alone. The desire for wealth, the love of money doesn't come alone. It comes with bad friends – temptations and snares and foolish and harmful desires and all kinds of evil.

Number four: materialism can blind you to what God has already provided. Look at Hebrews 13:5. I love this verse. Hebrews 13:5: "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have..." You see, materialism will blind you to what you have, and being content with it. You won't see – if you love and want more, you're not looking at what God has already given to you. You're all consumed with what you don't have, instead of being content with what God has provided. Do you think being rich, do you think those who are rich, are satisfied? You think they stop coveting? You think they stop wanting and wanting more? I don't remember. Maybe it was Getty that was asked at one point, you know, how much

money is enough? And he said, “Just one more dollar.” It’s always that way. But notice the rest of the verse – not only are we blinded to the material provision that God has made for us, but the spiritual provision as well: “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you...’” Not only do you have what you need to live in this life, but you have God and He’s never going away. Your money might go away. Your investments might disappear. Inflation might eat ‘em all up. But God’s going nowhere – you’ve got Him. But materialism blinds us to what we have. Jesus warned us that materialism is a deadly danger because it is one of the chief causes of spiritual blindness.

There’s a third and final danger back in Matthew 6 – I want you to turn there with me – in verse 24. It’s the danger of becoming a worshiper of materialism. Verse 24: “No one can serve two masters...” Now on the face of it, that doesn’t appear to be true at first, right? I mean, most of us have had a couple of jobs at one time and we’ve had a couple of different bosses. That’s where English can kind of obscure our Lord’s meaning. Because the Greek text isn’t talking about the employer-employee relationship. The Greek verb that’s translated as *serve* in this verse is the verb form of the Greek noun *doulos*. This refers to working as a slave. And the word for masters is the plural form of *kurios*, meaning *lords* or *masters*. So what Jesus is saying is: a slave can’t have two masters. And if he tries to have two masters, one of those masters is eventually going to exercise a greater authority. Look at the rest of the verse: “...for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he’ll be devoted to one and despise the other.” You will ultimately prefer one master above the other, especially when there’s a contest between the two.

D.A. Carson writes, “Matthew 6:24 warns us that during crises, our allegiances get sorted out and only one can come out on top. One master will be preferred. What or whom we want to serve most will be revealed.” See, here’s how it works. For a while, you can look like you’re really able to be a slave to pursuing wealth and serving God – looks like you can do it. But then a point of conflict comes when the two clash. When one of them is telling you to do one thing and the other is telling you to do another. When your career says this is what you need to do, and the Lord says you need to make sure that you’re being a spiritual leader in your family, and you need to make sure you have them where they need to be. At that moment, you’re going to decide between masters. The decision you make will tell you everything you need to know about who your master is. That’s what Jesus is saying.

Notice the end of verse 24: “You cannot serve God and wealth.” The Aramaic word for *wealth* is *mamona* or, in Greek, *mammon*. Some versions use the word *mammon*. That wasn’t an actual god. It’s the Aramaic word for *wealth* – wealth held in money, possessions, property, etc. And He says you cannot! It’s a strong word which speaks of impossibility. You see, in this brief statement, Jesus is making one of the most profound statements about spiritual existence anywhere in Scripture. It’s this: You are a slave of something. Every person hearing my voice, myself included – we are all slaves to someone or something. There’s no such thing as a truly free person. You are ultimately either a slave to sin (maybe the sin of materialism, maybe the sin

of pleasure, of physical appetites--some sort of sin) or God. That's it. In Romans 6:20, Paul says you were the slaves of sin (before you came to Christ) Listen to verse 22 of Romans 6: "But now having been freed from your slavery to sin, and (*listen to what he says*) enslaved to God..." That's it. Every person here, every person who exists, every person who ever has existed was a slave either to sin or to God. Those are the only two options. Jesus here is talking about more than just being a slave in the sense of a human slave to another human. His point, here, is that whatever you are a slave to, you are in reality worshiping. You can't have both wealth as the object of your worship and God at the same time. As John Calvin writes: "Where the affection is not entire, there is no true worship of God." Or William Hendriksen: "This supreme allegiance cannot be rendered to two parties. Whoever renders it becomes a worshiper. And the one to whom it is rendered becomes his god." So the real danger that Jesus is pointing out in verse 24 is that wealth can usurp the place of God and become the object of our worship. Calvin was right when he said the human mind is a factory of idols. It's part of our fallenness. We just are good at producing idols. And wealth can easily become an idol. As one author puts it: "Anybody who divides his allegiance between God and mammon has already given it to mammon since God can be served only with entire and exclusive devotion. This is simply because He is God. He said, I am the Lord. That is My name. My glory I will give to no other. To try to share Him with other loyalties is to have opted for idolatry."

You see, you were wired by God and I was wired by God for worship. You are hardwired for worship, and a worshiper you will be. You can't stop worshiping. If it's not the true God, then you're worshiping something else. And all too often, idolatry is about financial prosperity. Have you ever asked yourself: why did people in the Old Testament worship those gods? Why did they worship Baal for example? Well, remember now, they lived in an agricultural society. And who was Baal? He was the god of rain, the god of the storms. They worshiped Baal because they thought they could get him to give rain and they would enjoy greater financial prosperity. It's often connected to idolatry. In fact, Hosea 2:5 – Israel said, "...I will go after other gods, who give me my bread, my water, my wool, my flax, my oil and my drink." That's what they were after. It was about financial prosperity. They were worshiping at the idol of mammon figuratively speaking. Hosea 2:8 says, "For Israel does not know that it was I (*God says*) who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, and lavished on her silver and gold, which they then used for Baal."

So understand idolatry has often been about financial prosperity, and the same is true today. Our culture worships at the shrine of materialism, just as surely as if everyone had wood or stone statues in their homes and they fell down and paid them homage. Have you become a slave of materialism? Have you made it an idol? Let me ask you a couple of questions. Just discern this in your own heart. Do you love wealth more than you love anything else including God? Are you willing to disobey God to have it? Do you believe that wealth will bring you the greatest happiness and joy? Do you obey the desire for wealth and make sacrifices to it to satisfy it – sacrifices of your family, and your time, and your health in order to get it? If you answered yes

to one or more of those questions, then it has become an idol. Oh and by the way, an idol isn't always a complete substitute for the true God. Idols were often set alongside the true God. In 2 Kings 17:41, it speaks of the nations like Assyria who "feared Yahweh, but also served their idols; their children likewise and their grandchildren, as their fathers did, so they do to this day." Listen. You can be a worshiper of the true God and still be an idolater. You just put something on the shelf next to Him that matters as much to you, and it's become an idol.

Let me urge you as I have had to do with my own soul. Search your soul. G. Campbell Morgan writes: "Let men take five minutes to shut out everything except the great fact that they stand alone with God. If they will, if they dare, let them ask as they stand before Him in light of the first commandment, 'What is my god? To what is my life really devoted?' If the answer indicates anything that puts God into the background, then in the name of heaven and of their own safety, let them tear down every idol and let the God who was and who is and who always will be, be their God." May we never forget our Lord's words: "You cannot serve God and wealth." Let's pray together.

Our Father, we are cut to the heart by Your words to us, because we live in a materialistic culture and we are influenced by it every day – by the advertisements and the cries to have more stuff-- that somehow happiness is found in the abundance of possessions. Father, I pray that those of us who know and love You, You would help us, help us to see it and to respond to it appropriately. Lord, may we invest our resources not primarily here, but may we truly invest our hearts and our resources in heaven, in the kingdom work. And Father, I pray that You'd protect us from spiritual blindness. Help us to see. May we be able to live outside of our times and to look in and see, rather than being blinded by what everyone else is blinded by.

Father, I also pray for those here this morning who are truly spiritually blind – to the gospel, to the need of their souls, to their own sin, to the beauty of Christ, to the forgiveness that's found in His life and death. Father, I pray that today you would remove the blindness, that You who commanded there to be light in the universe would speak into their souls and say, Let there be light. May they see their sin. May they see Christ and what He has done for them in His death for sin. And may they put their faith and confidence in Him alone. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.