DEPENDENCE ON . . .

Do not store up for yourselves treasures in this world where they are subject to the ravages of such things as moth and corrosion and where thieves can dig in and steal. But store up your treasures in the Kingdom where moth and corrosion do not destroy and where thieves cannot dig in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, their too will be your heart.
The eye enables a person to see light. If therefore the eye is singular, your whole person will be light. But if your eye is covetous, your person will be darkness. If therefore, the very organ that should bring you light is the source of darkness in you, how great your darkness.
It is impossible to be a slave to two masters. For a person will either neglect the one and prefer the other, or will pay attention to one and disregard the other. You cannot be a slave to God and to avarice at the same time.
Matthew 6:19-24

This is a new section of the Sermon on the Mount. Here, Matthew presents three short pericopes that contrast the pursuit of wealth or *"material good"* and the trappings that come with it in this world, against the *"single-hearted"* desire of the disciple to the will of the Father. A desire to be loyal to Yahweh and to do his will alone is the means of true wealth.

These three pericopes are in keeping with and also *extend* the emphasis of the Sermon on the Mount concerning righteousness and discipleship.

Since the Gospel of Luke also contains parallels to these teachings, it is likely that Matthew has collected these teachings together in his presentation of Jesus' first major discourse.

**one of the reasons to point out that writers such as Matthew gathered these teaching from oral traditions is the often used mnemonic parallelism they present in their writing that acts an aid in teaching through memorization.*

Each pericope is set forth in the tradition of wisdom genre and in parallel form. Again, Matthew uses a three-part formula for aiding in conveyance of his narrative. The three related but independent pericopes are as follows:

1) the storing up of treasures vv.19-21;
2) the single or covetous eye vv. 22-23;
3) the impossibility of serving two masters v.24.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures in this world where they are subject to the ravages of such things as moth and corrosion and where thieves can dig in and steal. But store up your treasures in the Kingdom where moth and corrosion do not destroy and where thieves cannot dig in and steal. For wherever your treasure is, their too will be your heart.
Matthew 6:19-20

The clause *"where moth and corrosion consume"* expresses the truth that treasures stored up on the earth are all at best insecure and temporary.

"Consume" here can be phrased as *to render unapparent / destroy / corrupt / disfigure.*

These earthly treasures are subject to the decaying nature of this world in a variety of forms.

Consume is a strong word denoting ruin or destruction. The *moth* was a well-known destroyer in the ancient world and thus came to be seen as a symbol of destruction.

> *Behold, the LORD God helps me, who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.*
> *Isaiah 50:9*

> *For the moth will eat them up like a garment, and the worm will eat them like wool; but my righteousness will be forever; and my salvation to all generations.*
> *Isaiah 51:8*

> *how much more those who dwell in house of clay, whose foundations is in the dust, who are crushed like the moth.*
> *Job 4:19*

"Corrosion" or *"rust"* is a more difficult word to parse. The literal meaning of the word is *"eating."* In this sense *"worm"* and *"moth"* are parallel.

> *Jesus said, "The kingdom of the Father is like a merchant who had a load of goods and found a pearl. That merchant was wise. He sold the load and brought the pearl alone. You too, seek his unfailing and enduring treasure, where no moth comes near to devour and no worm destroys.*
> *Gospel of Thomas 76*

The idea, however, can include locust or any other crop destroying creature.

> *I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of delights.*
> *Malich 3:11*

In other Old Testament passages the moth is referred to as *"rot"* or *"dry rot."*

> *Man wastes away like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten.*
> *Job 13:28*

> *But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah.*
> *Hosea 5:12*

> *Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten.*
> *James 5:2*

Probably the more accurate rendering Matthew has in mind is *decay, rot,* or *corrosion.*

where thieves can dig in and steal – refers to other constant threats to earthly treasures. Burglary was not uncommon in the ancient world as it was not difficult for thieves to burrow their way through mud-brick walls of the typical Palestinian house.

In the dark they dig through houses, by day they shut themselves up; they do not know the light.
Job 24:16

Treasures in the ancient world were often buried under house floors. This has been validated by archeological discoveries. The point being that earthly treasures are easily lost.

The disciples are therefore, encouraged to store up treasure up for themselves treasures in heaven or to be more precise, in the Kingdom of God.

The concept of treasures in heaven as good works stored up before God is a common one in Jewish tradition.

If you have much give abundantly; if you have little take care even to bestow willingly a little, for thus you store up for yourself a good reward for the day of necessity.
Tobit 4:9

And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple that is in Jerusalem, each to its place. You shall put them in the house of God.
Ezra 6:5

Spend your money for your brother and hide it not under a stone to perish; dispose of your treasure as the Most High commands, for that will profit you more than the gold. Store up for almsgiving in your treasure house, and it will save you from every evil; better than a stout shield or a sturdy spear it will fight for you against the foe.
Sirach 29:10-13

The foolishness of the person who looks for security by storing up treasures in this world is illustrated in the Gospel of Luke 12:16-21.

But God said to him, "Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not right toward God."
Luke 12:20-21

They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.
1 Timothy 6:18-19

For wherever your treasure is, their too will be your heart.
Matthew 6:21

This is the main point of the pericope. The main and central organ of the body is a well-known metaphor for the center of a person's inner being: the center of their attention and commitment. Matthew uses this idea elsewhere in the sermon.

But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
Matthew 5:28

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.
Matthew 5:8

People who store up treasure on earth will surely have their attentions and commitments turned toward earthly matters than to the will of the Father.

The eye enables a person to see light. If therefore the eye is singular, your whole person will be light. But if your eye is covetous, your person will be darkness. If therefore, the very organ that should bring you light is the source of darkness in you, how great your darkness.
Matthew 6:22-23

These verses must be understood within the context of the text around them. Thus, the context of wealth and the earthly desire to obtain it in whatever form, is what shapes this pericope.

The *"singular"* eye and the *"covetous"* eye should not be understood in a physical sense as in a healthy or diseased eye.

The *covetous* eye is the *evil eye* of Near Eastern cultures – an eye that enviously covets what belongs to others. It is the eye of *avarice*, the eye of *greed.*

Rabbi Joshua said: an evil eye, the evil of inclination, and hatred for humanity put a person out of the world. Rabbi Yose said: Let the property of your fellow be as precious to you as your own. Make yourself fit to study Torah for it will not be yours by inheritance; and let all your actions be for the sake of the name of heaven. Mishna abot. 2:12

Any love that is dependent on something, when that something ceases, the love ceases. But any love that is not dependent on anything will never cease.
Mishna abot. 5:16

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.
Mark 7:21-22

In the miser's opinion his share is too small, he refuses his neighbor and brings ruin on himself. The miser's eye is rapacious for bread, but on his own table he sets it stale.
Sirch 14:8-10

The *singular* eye is the opposite. It is a generous eye.

the one who exhorts, in in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.
Romans 12:8

for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.
2 Corinthians 8:2

This is an eye that is not attached to wealth but is ready to part with it.

The idea of a *single eye* is rooted in the context of devotion to one purpose.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a singleness of heart as you would Christ.
Ephesians 6:5

In the Hellenistic world, importance was placed on the eye thus the phrase *"the eye is the light of the body."* What seems to be meant is that the eye makes sight possible.

The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and good news refreshes the bones.
Proverbs 15:30

fearing only the eyes of men; he does not understand that the eyes of the Lord, ten thousand times brighter than the sun, observe every step a man takes and peer into hidden corners.
Sirach 23:19

Understand, that *eye* and *light* metaphors are a vehicle for Matthew's argument concerning the disciple and material wealth. The point is that the eye is what brings light to the body; if instead the eye itself becomes only a source of darkness, how great one's personal darkness is.

The *"single"* eye is the *"generous"* eye of discipleship and its source of light. An *"evil"* or *"covetous"* eye is the source of darkness.

It is impossible to be a slave to two masters. For a person will either neglect the one and prefer the other, or will pay attention to one and disregard the other. You cannot be a slave to God and to avarice at the same time.
Matthew 6:24

The situation of a slave having two masters was unusual but still possible. An example of this is when a slave was owned by two brothers.

The Talmud contains cases where a slave gained half his freedom but remained a *"half-slave."*

Cases of more than one owner of a slave can be found in Scripture.

As we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners much gain by fortune telling.

But when her owners saw that their hope of gain was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the rulers.
Acts 16:16, 19

The point being here, however, is that a slave with two masters can do justice to neither. Truly to serve a master demanded total and undivided commitment. This is why serving two master's is impossible.

Some translations phrase the wording as follows:

For a person will hate the one and love the other.

This translation is misleading since the Jewish idiom of loving and hating intends to express a matter of absolute versus partial commitment. What Jesus has in view here is the degree of commitment of the slave to his duty.

The use of the word *"hate"* in the sense of commitment is clear from another passage where Jesus teaches this concept which can be found in Luke's narrative.

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yet and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.
Luke 14:26

"Hate" in this sense can be equated with *"love less than."* Matthew uses this language later in his narrative but its concept is already found in the Old Testament.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.
Matthew 10:37

So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah and served Laban for another seven years. When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb but Rachel was barren.
Genesis 29:30-31

She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.
Genesis 29:33

If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other hated, and both the loved and the hated have born him children, and if the firstborn son belongs to the hated,
Deuteronomy 21:15

For a person will either neglect the one and prefer the other, or will pay attention to one and disregard the other.

This wording of the verse lends validity to the idea of love and hate before it. The word *"neglect"* need not be taken as *"despise"* but rather that the person will prefer one to the other thereby neglecting one.

The point of this verse is that by nature slavery requires absolute loyalty and commitment to a single master. In the same way, being a disciple requires absolute and undivided loyalty and commitment.

This absolute and undivided commitment is seen in the wording *"It is impossible to serve two masters."*

The wording is often rendered as *God and mammon.* This is a translation from the Aramaic noun for *wealth* or in a broad sense *property.* In the sense Matthew uses the words of Jesus, it is regarded as a potential *master,* so its various meanings aren't as important as that designation.

Consider here the concept that serving another master is akin to being *"unrighteous."*

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.
Luke 16:9

The concept of serving an earthly master of wealth is appropriately captured in the Mishna.

He (Hillel) used to say: The more flesh, the more worms; the more property, the more anxiety; the more wives, the more witchcraft; The more female servant, the more lewdness; The more slaves, the more robbery; [But] the more torah, the more life; The more sitting [in the company of scholars], the more understanding; The more charity, the more peace. If one acquires a good name, he has acquired something for himself; If one acquires for himself knowledge of Torah, he has

acquired life in the world to come.
Mishna abot. 2:7

The issue in view in these passages is not wealth primarily, but an absolute and unqualified discipleship. Wealth, it happens, is only the most conspicuous example of that which can distract from true discipleship. Only the rarest of individuals can possess much of this world's wealth without becoming enslaved to it and without letting it cut the nerve of true discipleship. Most important is where one's heart lies, i.e., what controls one's interest, energy, and commitment. There is no absolute requirement here for poverty. But the individual disciple must be sensitive to that point at which wealth and possessions are not compatible with authentic discipleship. Jesus askes for uncompromising commitment to God's will and purposes. This is what it means to store up treasure in heaven. The person who stores up treasure on earth "is not rich toward God" (Luke 12:21) and is in the end "a fool." The person who is distracted from unqualified discipleship because of a covetous eye exists in a deep darkness and is to be pitied. If one chooses to follow Jesus, the commitment and service entailed are absolute. The view of the single-minded nature of discipleship is in keeping with the view of discipleship elsewhere in the Gospel:

34 *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.* ***35*** *For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.* ***36*** *And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.* ***37*** *Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* ***38*** *And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* ***39*** *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*
Matthew 10:34-39

24 *Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* ***25*** *For whoever would save his life[a] will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* ***26*** *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?*
Matthew 16:24-26
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