

AM Matthew 6:19-34 "The eye is the lamp of the body"

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[0 : 00] Our scripture reading this morning is from Matthew chapter 6, and if you have a pew Bible it will be on page 978, I believe.

Matthew chapter 6. And we're going to read verse 19 through to 34 to the end of this chapter. Let's hear God's word. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

[1 : 17] If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness. No one can serve two masters. For either he'll hate the one and love the other, or he'll be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and money. Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will put on.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns.

And yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Of which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to the span of his life? And why are you anxious about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil, nor spin. Yet I tell you, even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these.

[2 : 21] But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things. And your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. And all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow.

For tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. Amen. We pray God will bless the reading of his words.

2 Corinthians 4 Therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.

[3 : 26] We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word. But by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake.

For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Amen. And may God bless these words to us. Well, let's turn back, if you have your Bibles there, to Matthew chapter 6.

[4 : 38] And we're really going to be focusing on Matthew 6, just verses 22 and 23. I'll read that section again.

The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, 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 in you is darkness, how great is that darkness. Well, before we come to focus on any individual verse, it's always good, isn't it, to consider the context of where that verse comes from in the Bible.

The Bible, as I hope you know, is a complete unit. Each part in perfect agreement with every other part. And it has a great majesty and a beauty about it that is evident to anyone who reads it with the eyes of faith.

They'll see that it is God's revelation to us. And within the Bible, there is structure and there are patterns. And most of you will know, I'm sure, that the first five books of the Old Testament, the books of Moses or the law, are foundational to the opening account of God's revelation of his plan of redemption for us.

[6 : 13] And in a similar way, Matthew's Gospel opens the New Testament and it has something similar in terms of its structure. Those who study these things tell us that Matthew's Gospel has five extended blocks of teaching from Jesus.

and if you've got your Bible there, if you look at the end of verse, chapter, where are we?

End of chapter 7, verse 28, it says, and when Jesus finished these sayings. Well, there are five places where Jesus is recorded as having finished these sayings, marking off five blocks of teaching from Jesus.

and the commentators tell us that these are like five, there's a parallel structure there with the five books of Moses. And Jesus tells us plainly that he has not come to abolish the law, he's not come to abolish the five first books of the Bible, but to fulfil them.

And so as we study these five blocks of teaching, there's a sense in which we're looking for the ways in which Jesus fulfills the law.

[7 : 29] And the most famous of these five blocks is the one we're in at the moment, which is usually called the Sermon on the Mount, as you probably know. There are other parallels as well.

Jesus went up on a mountain just like Moses and delivers what seems like a new law or a new covenant for us. So the Sermon on the Mount is one of the most famous passages in the whole Bible.

But it's also one of the most commonly misunderstood passages in the whole Bible. Because anyone reading the Sermon on the Mount cannot help but admire the beauty and the intrinsic just beautifulness of Jesus' teaching.

There's nobody really has a bad word to say about the Sermon on the Mount. But many people imagine that it is merely an attractive set of ethical principles for how to live your life.

and that that is all that Jesus gives us. And if we think that the Sermon on the Mount is merely ethical teaching merely moral advice no matter how glorious it is then we'll miss what Jesus is really teaching us in the Sermon on the Mount.

[9 : 08] On a quick skim read you might think that this passage from 19 all the way through to 24 is simply advice about our attitude to money.

I hope we'll see as we study it together that it's much more than that. We're going to look at this in three parts. Firstly what does Jesus mean when he says the eye is the lamp of the body?

Secondly what are the implications of your eye being healthy or your eye being bad in this sense and thirdly why does Jesus add this statement at the end about the darkness that's associated with a bad eye?

The eye is the lamp of the body. I take it for granted that we all understand that this is what we call a metaphor. Jesus is not talking about our physical eyes he's talking about our spiritual sight our ability to see the spiritual reality of what is happening around us and how well we can see the spiritual reality of what is going on in our lives determines the spiritual health of our whole body.

My eye was first drawn to this passage a number of weeks ago because I have the privilege of being in a prayer what we call a prayer triplet. I meet with two other Christian guys and we share a bit about what's happening in our lives and then we read a short section of the Bible together and then we pray together and my friend read this and when he read it these two verses in the middle jumped out as being not so directly about our attitude attitude to money and I thought I must pay

more attention to these verses and that's why I'm here today to share with you what I've been studying in these verses.

[11 : 18] I said it's about our spiritual the eye is the lamp of the body is about our spiritual perception our spiritual sight but what Jesus is saying is that it's about our whole body.

Jesus doesn't divide us into soul and body in that sense. We're whole people. And the question is what do we see as being truly valuable?

What is really worth looking for? What is worth saving for? Well what Jesus is really saying here is that there is a more real reality reality than that which we see with our eyes.

There's a spiritual reality isn't there? And this is something that I hope that the reason we're here is that we know that there is a spiritual reality. This world is not all there is.

And those who think that the Sermon on the Mount is merely moral advice or ethical commentary on how to live a noble and admirable life.

[12 : 34] They're going to be stumped when we come to the last of Jesus' great blocks of teaching in Matthew in chapters 24 and 25 which is sometimes called the Olivet Discourses, the advice and the teaching that Jesus gives in the Mount of Olives.

Because there he's speaking about things that would just don't relate to these things at all. He's talking about signs appearing in the sky and angels gathering people from the four winds and the Son of Man coming and sitting on his throne and separating the sheep from the goats and some being assigned to eternal punishment and some to eternal life.

There's a reality far deeper than that which we merely see with our physical eyes. There's a spiritual reality. Can we see it?

Now, as the Bible progresses, we see a progression in the revelation as we understand more about what this means.

And at the time we get to later in the New Testament, places like Thessalonians and most especially in the last book of the Bible in Revelations, we see more about this spiritual reality revealed to us.

[14 : 03] And as we see that, we'll discover that in actual fact, it will turn out that while everyone around us has been so desperate to demonstrate their individuality, how they're so diverse, aren't they?

different religions, different people expressing their identities in different ways, different people spending their money on things to show what's important to them in different ways, but in the end, it will turn out that there were only two masters.

And Jesus describes this alternative master as money here, where if anyone's using an older translation, you might have the word mammon in the King James version, mammon is a kind of personification of worldly wealth as almost like a false god, or the confidence that comes from trusting in worldly wealth.

And there's a number of places, especially in Revelation, where the commentators describe this trust in the things that we can see, the things of this world. God. Some of the commentators describe that as the world system.

You know, you'll see this as we read the New Testament, there's reference made to the God of this world, meaning Satan, but meaning the way in which Satan persuades people that this is all there is, this world.

[15 : 39] And in Revelation, that is personified in a frightening way. there's a beast described isn't there, there in chapter 13 in Revelation, and it says no one could buy or sell unless they had this number of, or this mark of the beast on their head, or their forehead, and it seems, it seems frightening when we read that.

But it's not intended to be frightening, it's intended to be an encouragement to us, and we're not supposed to spend our time with these difficult parts of the Bible trying to decide, is this strange reference something about some new cryptocurrency that's going to come that we have to all use to buy and sell food or whatever.

People have always been trying to make that specific, and by making that very specific, they rob it of its application. It was relevant when it was written, it's been relevant since the day Jesus ascended into heaven, and it will remain relevant until the day that he returns.

It's not going to be fulfilled with Saddam Hussein rebuilding Babylon, or with the advent of barcodes, or European Union trading rules, or any of these strange theories that people sometimes

try and give us.

No. From the day, as I say, from the day that Jesus ascended until the day that he returns, this world system will be there, and it will be a distraction for us as Christians.

[17 : 28] And those of us who are not devoted to serving that world system, who are not devoted to accumulating wealth for ourselves, will find that our lives are more difficult here and now, but we're encouraged to know that we will triumph in the end.

The eye is the lamp of the body. How do we see the world around us? Do we set our hearts on earthly treasures? Or do we see more clearly the spiritual reality that the Bible talks about?

It's worth noting that it's evident to us when we think about it clearly.

People often say this, don't they? You can't take it with you when you talk about our worldly wealth. The prophet Job famously says, naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. But even more thought provoking for me and for those of us who are Christians, there are verses in 1 Corinthians 4, verse 7, what do you have that you did not receive? We're so easily distracted, aren't we?

[18 : 50] people. But the eye is the lamp of the body. So if the eye is the lamp of the body, Jesus goes on to say, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

Jesus presents us here with a contrast. Your eyes are either good or bad, and these two possibilities, as we'll see, lead to two very different outcomes.

But when I was meditating on this verse, I thought, well, one of the natural questions that arises is, yes, we've got these two classifications, we've got good and bad eyes, but are there degrees within these classifications?

Can one person have really good eyes, and another person not so good? And I think surely the answer is implied by what's spoken of in the preceding verse. We take it as read that we all accept that some people store up more treasure on earth than others.

That's obvious to us when we look around us. And so some people will have more treasure in heaven than others. And that's to do with how well we see the spiritual reality that is around us.

[20 : 15] In our tradition, we don't emphasize very much about that. And I think there's two reasons for that. One is that the Bible doesn't reveal to us a great deal of detail about what heaven will be like.

And so we don't really know for certain. Often we're doing at best informed speculation as to what our lives will be like in heaven.

But the other main reason why we don't emphasize that aspect of the Bible's teaching is because, in my opinion, those whose eyes are bad are easily put wrong by that kind of teaching because we're so prone to misunderstanding this teaching.

We're so prone, we're hardwired to believe that the idea of treasure in heaven might be something to do with earning enough good stuff in order to be given entrance into heaven, aren't we?

That's the way I was before I became a Christian. I genuinely thought that there must be some minimum standard of goodness and if I could just make sure I reach that and no more, I could maybe balance a nice easy life, not being too strict, not too much of a goody two shoes here and still get into heaven.

[21 : 39] And that's not how it works of course. And I'm sure I'm not alone in having thought that. And so we don't often mention this dimension of what life in heaven will be like.

But Jesus does teach here that some people will have more treasure in heaven than others. And a life lived trusting in what is revealed to us by Jesus will determine how much of a store of treasure we have here in heaven.

But what really matters is not how much treasure you have in heaven, but whether you have any treasure in heaven at all. Are your eyes good or are they bad?

Do you see the spiritual reality of this life? Or are you in the dark? Are you blinded? So to recap, Jesus says, the eye is the lamp of the body.

This is a metaphor. He's speaking about our spiritual vision. And then he presents to us this contrast. Your eyes are either good or bad. There are only two kinds of spiritual vision, only two choices.

[23 : 01] choices. But lastly, he's given us a metaphor and a contrast. And now he gives us a warning. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness.

It's not recorded for us anywhere what Jesus' voice sounded like. He may have had a deep voice. He might have had a high pitched voice. We don't know. I don't think it's wrong to speculate that Jesus would have used a different tone of voice in different situations.

We were speaking earlier about Jesus clearing these money changers out of the temple. We know that he would have used an angry and presumably a loud voice as he chased these people out of the temple.

And in the same way we can presume that in other situations he used different tones of voice. When he said to the women caught in adultery, has no one condemned you and neither do I. Must have been a sensitive tone of voice, surely. And when he said to the wind and the waves, quiet, be still, surely it was an authoritative tone of voice.

[24 : 14] And so what tone of voice would Jesus have used in saying this sentence, if then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness.

It's not asking a question really, it's a warning. I think he would have had a shudder in his voice. I want to read some scriptures to help us understand what he means by delivering this warning. Ephesians 4, 18. So I tell you this and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their thinking.

They're darkened in their understanding and alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that's in them due to the hardness of their hearts. Or consider 1 John 2, 8-11.

At the same time, this is a new commandment I'm writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever sees he's in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness.

[25 : 34] Whoever loves his brother abides in the light and in him there's no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness and does not know where he's going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

And especially Ephesians 6, 12, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

There are only two masters. There are the powers of darkness. Powers of darkness that will lead us to alienation from God, stumbling around in a state of spiritual blindness, serving the forces, the spiritual forces of evil.

And those who serve this other master, even the light within them, Jesus says, even when they think what they're doing is morally right and good, they're doing what's wrong in God's eyes.

And then there are those who serve God, whose treasure is in heaven, those who see by the true light, who walk in love for their brothers and sisters in Christ.

[27 : 06] Christ. And they'll be involved in a struggle against the spiritual forces of evil in this world. And so they'll have no true treasure in this earth.

But their treasure will be in heaven, something of everlasting value. And so the question this morning has to be, whose side are you on?

Are your eyes good or bad? Is your whole body full of light? Or is even the light within you actually great darkness?

Well, I'll leave it at that. And may God bless his word to us this morning.