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Matthew 6:21 - 6:24



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg holds that in the "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus spoke in idioms familiar to his Jewish listeners to emphasize that God considers a person's heart condition more important than their material worth. He cites Proverbs to illustrate that the person with the generous eye will be blessed by God, while the one with a greedy eye will be cursed. Jesus urged his listeners to lay their treasures in heaven, not Earth, as those who focus their hearts and minds on material wealth will not serve God. In this way, love of God is synonymous with love of one's brethren, which includes helping those in need.

Transcript

Today we come to a very unusual saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. This is in Matthew 6, verses 21-24. Now, when I say very unusual, I don't mean that this whole passage is unusual nor unfamiliar.

Actually, there are some lines in this section that are very familiar to us, but right in the middle of it, there's a very difficult section. Jesus said in Matthew 6, verse 21, For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye.

If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad or evil, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness? No one can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one or love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and mammon. Now, the section about the eye being the light of the body, and the things that he said about that, are the passage I was referring to that is difficult, because it uses a Hebrew figure of speech with which most of us are not that familiar, and therefore might easily be confused by his statement. However, his original listeners would not have had the same problem, because they were Jewish, and they would have recognized the Jewish idiom.

This section follows immediately upon, and may well be seen as the conclusion of, the previous two verses, where Jesus said not to lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, but to lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. He said, because where your treasure

is, there your heart will be also. And then he talks about the lamp of the body being the eye, and a good eye will result in a body full of light.

A bad eye, or an evil eye, will result in a body full of darkness. And then he said, no one can serve two masters. In particular, no one can serve God and mammon.

Now, mammon is simply a word that means money, and therefore, Jesus is saying you cannot serve God and money, and that very clearly is related to what was said in the verses that we've treated the last couple of sessions, about not laying up for yourselves treasures on earth. You cannot have your treasures on earth, and your treasures in heaven also. You see, all of life is to be productive.

We human beings are capable of being productive at a very high level, compared to animals or plants, of course. Because we have brains, and we are mobile, and we have skills and talents and so forth, we can create things, we can manufacture, we can do all kinds of work. We can produce a great deal.

And among the things that we produce is wealth. Wealth is something that is produced by work. And this wealth is to be used for the kingdom of God.

Now, Jesus contrasts two options that people have sometimes done. Sometimes people lay up treasures on earth. If they produce more wealth than they need for survival, they may well hang on to the extra, and say the surplus is, I'm putting that away for a rainy day, and maybe an emergency might come up, or in my old age, I'll need this.

And so they lay up their treasures on earth for themselves. Jesus is saying that while it is not wrong to produce wealth, in fact, it's right to produce wealth, it's right to work. Yet, what you do with the surplus is what he addresses here.

Now, he says, of course, lay up your treasures in heaven. As we saw last time, elsewhere in Jesus' teaching, he equated laying up treasures in heaven with giving to the poor. That when you give to the poor, you are laying up treasures in heaven.

Obviously, you cannot give to the poor unless you have something to give. And for that reason, that makes a good argument for working, and earning, and acquiring wealth, so that you can give it to the poor. But the problem is that most people who acquire wealth hang on to their wealth rather than give it to the poor.

They lay up treasures for themselves on earth. And the fact that they do so shows that they place a very high value on their money, so much so that they cannot feel secure without having some laid up for the future. Now, Jesus said, where your treasure is, your heart will be also.

And as usual, Jesus is talking about the need for our hearts to be pure before God, and free from such motivations and such bondages as would prevent us from being able to

serve God with a pure and a clean heart. A love of money is not a pure heart. Covetousness, or love of money, is something the Bible warns about a great deal.

In fact, of the Ten Commandments, the one that was at the very end was, You shall not covet. You shall not desire to possess that which is not rightfully yours. Now, even if something is rightfully yours on human terms, yet what you have belongs to God, and therefore you should use in whatever way that He desires to have His things used, which have been put into your hands to be managed.

And so, what you do with your treasures, Jesus said, is related to where your heart is. Now, it's not clear what comes first, the placing of the treasures or the placing of the heart. Jesus said, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Meaning that if you have laid up your treasures in heaven, your heart will not be on this earth, your heart will be in heaven. You'll be looking forward to going to where your treasures are. If you lay up your treasures on earth, your heart will be on the earth and in the world.

And you'll be thinking about the things of the world all the time. And that is the case, of course, with people who accumulate a great deal of money on earth. Generally speaking, their thoughts are on matters of earthly business and management and things like that, some of which cannot be avoided, especially if we're to be good stewards of large amounts that God has given us.

But it is nonetheless the case that when we have treasures on earth, our thoughts and our hearts and our attention are to a large extent earthbound. And Paul told us in Colossians chapter 3, he said in verses 1 and 2, If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting, at the right hand of God. Set your mind, the King James says, set your affection on things above and not on the things of the earth.

Our hearts and our mind, our attention, our concerns, our affections, are supposed to be set on the things of heaven, not on the things of earth. Now, we live on earth and we should be good stewards of what we possess on earth. But nonetheless, earth is not our home.

And the more comfortable we are on this earth, the more of our possessions we have invested in this earth, the more this earth will seem like it is home. I read just today, I believe it was, about a Christian man who was given a tour of another man's estate, a very large estate, a mansion with palatial grounds and so forth. And he was very impressed by the great wealth and beauty of all these things.

But when he had seen it all, he said, these are the things that make it hard for a man to die. And that's true in more senses than one. If you've got your treasures on earth, you

don't want to go.

Death is an unwelcome transition. You want to stay where your treasures are, because where your treasure is, that's where your heart is. Another way it makes it hard to die is that it makes it hard to die prepared to meet God.

Because Jesus said it's difficult for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. So in more ways than one, a large amount of money and possessions on earth definitely are the things that make it hard for a man to die.

But what Jesus is saying is your heart will be where your treasures are. If you give your treasures to the poor and therefore lay them up in heaven, then your heart will be on things of heaven, because you will not have much invested here on earth. But if you have heavily invested in earth and you've put your treasures into the stock market and into treasury bill accounts and into real estate, into things that are all of this earth, and you've laid them up for yourself here, as Jesus said not to do, then your heart and your concerns and your attention will be upon those things, and you will be in disobedience to Christ.

Now here's how Jesus elaborates on that, and this is the difficult part. He says, the lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.

But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness? Now this is one of the more peculiar things that Jesus said, very difficult to know precisely the meaning, when he talks about the lamp of the body being the eye. Some people think of this in terms of the eye being like a window of the soul, but that's not really what Jesus was saying.

Jesus was using a figure of speech that the Jews knew very well. His disciples knew it very well. If a man was a miser, or if he was greedy, it was said in the Jewish idiom, he had an evil eye.

If he was a generous soul, and gave freely to the poor, and so forth, he was said to have a good eye. Now, whether you understand why they did this or not, we must realize that that is why they did it. Perhaps the reason that an evil eye or a good eye was associated respectively with being either miserly or generous, is because the eye was associated with the idea of desire.

You cast your eyes on a thing, in the Hebrew idiom, and that means you set your desires upon it. We read in Genesis chapter 39 and verse 7, that when Joseph was serving in the house of Potiphar, he was a handsome man in his prime, and his master had a wife, and it says she cast her eyes upon Joseph. What that means is she set her desires upon him, and she sought to seduce him.

She did not succeed, but she tried, because her desires were for that man. Actually, literally, in the Hebrew, it says she lifted up her eyes upon him. But the idea is that her eye represented her desire.

We know from Scripture in Ecclesiastes chapter 2 and verse 10, that Solomon, when he was describing how he had indulged himself with every luxury, he said, whatever my eyes desired, I gave them. Now, the eye being a thing that represents your desires, what you set your eyes on, what you set your heart on, what you set your desire upon, is what is referred to here. And to talk about a bad eye, or a good eye, has to do with whether you set your desires on that which is good, or on that which is evil.

The man who is miserly with his goods, desires money in an unhealthy way. His eye is not good. His desires are not healthy.

A man who gives freely of what he has, because he'd rather lay up treasures in heaven, his eye is good. His desires are for that which is good and commendable. Now, there can be no doubt that the idea of an evil eye or a good eye spoke of these ideas of miserliness and generosity to the Jewish listeners of Jesus in the first place.

We can see several times in the Old Testament this language is used. For example, in Proverbs 22.9, it says, literally, He who has a good eye will be blessed, for he gives his bread to the poor. Notice, the man who has a good eye gives his bread to the poor.

However, over in Proverbs 28 and verse 22, it says, A man with an evil eye hastens after riches. So here we have these two expressions, a good eye and an evil eye. In Proverbs 22.9, it says, He who has a good eye gives his bread to the poor.

In Proverbs 28.22, he who has an evil eye hastens after riches. So we can see that the man with an evil eye is a lover of money, and a man with a good eye is a man who is generous and gives to the poor. In Proverbs 23 and verse 6, it says, Do not eat the bread of he that has an evil eye.

Now, the New King James, which I'm looking at, translates that as a miser. Do not eat the bread of a miser. But in the Hebrew, in the original, it says, Do not eat the bread of he who has an evil eye.

The translators correctly understood that he who has an evil eye is referring to a miser. So, an evil eye is a miserliness. A good eye is a generosity.

In Deuteronomy chapter 15 and verse 9, God is, in this passage, telling the Jews to give to the poor freely, and not to be miserly. And at one point, He says this, in Deuteronomy 15.9, Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, The seventh year of the year of release is at hand, and your eye be evil against your poor brother. And you give him nothing.

Now, notice God saying, Make sure this doesn't happen. Make sure your eye is not evil against your brother, so that you end up giving him nothing. The man with an evil eye does not give to the poor.

He hoards. Remember the parable that Jesus told in Matthew chapter 20, where a man hired men to work in his vineyard. Some worked all day, and some worked a few hours, and some worked only one hour.

But they all got the same pay. And those who worked all day and received only the same amount as those who worked only an hour complained, and said, That's not fair that we should get as much as they. And no more.

And the master said to them, in Matthew chapter 20, in verse 15, He said, Is your eye evil because I am generous? In other words, he's saying, I gave you a fit wage. If I want to give them a fit wage or even more, if I want to be generous with them, is that any business of yours? He said, Is your eye evil? That is, are you being greedy and miserly because I'm being more generous with someone else? So you can see again and again that this business of an evil eye means to be greedy or miserly. And to have a good eye means to be generous.

What's more, Jesus said about this evil eye, in Mark chapter 7, in verses 22 through 23, He said, Out of the heart of man proceed adulteries and fornications, etc., etc. And He said, And an evil eye. He said, These come out of the heart from within a man and defile a man.

So Jesus indicated that an evil eye, which we know to mean a miserly spirit, is something that comes from a bad heart. So when Jesus here speaks to His disciples, who are Jews, who are well accustomed to this phraseology and this idiom, He says, If your eye is bad, your whole body be full of darkness. If your eye is good, your whole body be full of light.

Of course, in the context, He's talking about giving to the poor. He's talking about laying up treasures in heaven. He's talking about not loving money.

And so He's saying, If you love money, if you're a miser, your whole body, and I believe the body here represents your life, will be full of light. If you're a miser, your whole body will be full of darkness. If you're a generous person, your whole body, your whole life will be filled with light.

Essentially, what He is saying is that if you love money, if your eye is darkened by greed, then you will be like a man in darkness. He cannot see where he's going. He'll be blinded by his greed, and he will not be able to walk wisely or righteously in this world, because he's in the dark.

However, if a man is generous, his heart is free from the love of money, then that person has a good eye. He gives to the poor, and his whole life is filled with light. He can see

where he's going.

You know, in 1 John, the idea of walking in the light and walking in darkness are contrasted in just about this same way. In John chapter 2, John tells us that we are to love our brother, and let me find the passage here. It is 1 John chapter 2, and verse 10, or starting at verse 9, he says, He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness until now.

He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness and does not know where he's going, because that darkness has blinded his eyes. Now, here's two kinds of people.

One is in darkness, not knowing where he's going, blinded by the darkness. The other is in the light, and he doesn't stumble because he can see where he's going. What is the difference? The man in the light is the one who loves his brother.

The one in the darkness is the one who hates his brother. Now, how does that jibe with what Jesus was saying in the passage we're looking at here? Well, John later on says this. In verse 11 of chapter 3 of 1 John, 1 John 3.11, For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain, who was of that wicked one and murdered his brother.

And why did he murder him? Because his own works were evil and his brothers were righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we've passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.

He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. And then in verse 17, But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? Now, notice, John says, The love of God is seen when, if you have this world's goods, and you see your brother has need, and you give to him, then that is love.

If you do not give to him, if you shut your heart up to him, and do nothing for him, then how does the love of God dwell in you? So, obviously, John equates love, or at least part of what love is, has to do with helping your brothers in need. Now, he has already said, if you love, you walk in the light. If you hate, you're in the darkness.

Jesus said, if your eye is good, that is, if you're generous, your body is full of light. If your eye is evil, that is, if you're miserly, and you don't help the poor, your body is filled with darkness. You can see that there is a parallel here, between what Jesus is saying is, you need to love your neighbor, and not love money.

You need to love the needy more than you love your money. If you love your money

more, your eye is bad, and you're walking in darkness, and you're full of darkness. If you love your brother more than you love your money, then you'll be generous, your eye is good, and you will walk in the light, said Jesus, and John expands on it in the passage we saw in 1 John.

Now, in verse 24 of Matthew 6, Jesus said, No one can serve two masters, for he will either hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. Now, Jesus is illustrating from actual servitude or employment, that you can't have two masters or employers that you are equally loyal to, because the time will come when one of them, when they both are trying to make demands on the same hours of your day, and you'll have to choose between them.

You can't have equal loyalty to two masters. There has to be one who takes precedence over the other in terms of your loyalty, so that if both of them ask you to work the same day, you'll say, I'm sorry to one and say, yes, I will to the other. You'll prefer the one and despise the other, as it were.

You will not credit him with the same loyalty. Now, Jesus said that's how it is with God and mammon. You can't serve God and you can't serve mammon at the same time.

Earlier, he said we need to lay up treasures in heaven, not on earth. Apparently, laying up treasures on earth for ourselves is serving mammon. Laying up treasures in heaven is serving God.

When we give to the poor, we are giving to God, the Bible says. And so we can't do both. We can't lay up for ourselves treasures on earth and lay up treasures in heaven.

He said you can do one, but you can't do both. And so he said make sure you lay up your treasures in heaven. And this you do by having a good eye, a generous spirit, by giving freely to the poor, by loving people more than you love your money.

And if you acquire money, it is not for yourself. It is for Christ. It is for his needs.

And Christ has needs today. Jesus said in Matthew 25, I was hungry and you fed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes.

And he said in as much as you do it to the least of these my brethren, you've done it to me. But he also said to the goats, I was hungry and you didn't feed me. I was naked and you didn't give me clothes.

And he said in as much as you did not do it to the least of these my brethren, you did not do it to me. So the teaching of Christ is that we serve God by serving his brethren. When they are in need, we help them.

We are laying up treasures in heaven then. If we do not do this, then we are laying up treasures for ourselves on earth. We are serving money.

We are not serving God. We can't do both. And therefore, we will either have our hearts in heaven where our treasures are, or our hearts in earth where our treasures are if that's where they are.

We'll continue looking at the Sermon on the Mount next time. Unfortunately, our time gets away too quickly. And so we'll have to close this session at this time.