

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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THE LAMP OF THE BODY IS THE EYE

Matthew 6:22-23

We will study today the passage in Matthew 6:22-23. Here the Lord Jesus uses a metaphor to teach us something very important about spiritual perception.

Matthew 6:22. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.

23 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!

The center of perception

What is the Lord Jesus trying to say to us here? The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is good, if your eye can see well, then your body is going to be full of light. But if your eye is bad, if it is sick, then your whole body will be full of darkness.

First, let us understand this picture very literally. Then we will move from the physical to the spiritual. The eye, physically, is the lamp of the body. If you look around you, you see light. The light is being conveyed into your whole person, into your body. If you close your eyes, what happens? Everything gets dark. You are in darkness. If you open your eyes, everything is bright. You close your eyes, and you are in the dark again.

Jesus uses this common experience to remind us that the eye is the center of our perception. It is the organ by which light enters the body. And what our body does depends largely on our ability to see because our eyes give us spatial orientation. Therefore the eyes guide the motions of our body.

Spiritual perception

Now, let us move from the physical to the spiritual. When Jesus speaks of the eye, He is of course not just talking at the physical level. What is used here in its literal sense has also a spiritual meaning. And the eye has an important spiritual sense in the Bible. It is used in connection with our spiritual eyesight, i.e., the capacity to see and to understand spiritual things.

We often make this kind of connection about the eye when we refer not to the physical eye, but to the mind's eye. When I say, 'Do you see what I mean?' obviously I am not asking whether you can see it with your physical eye. Words are not things that the eye can see. When I ask that question, I mean, 'Does your mind, the eye of your mind, perceive what I said?' In this case, you see with your

intellect. Your mind is now serving as your eye. Now, with spiritual eyes, you can see spiritual truths. You can perceive the glory of God. And that is what Jesus wants to talk to us about in this passage.

You remember that when Paul was commissioned to preach the gospel, he was commissioned ‘to open the eyes’ of the blind. The Lord Jesus said to him, *I now send you, **to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light*** (Acts 26:17-18). Obviously, this was not a question of opening our physical eyes, but to enable us to understand the word of God so that we may receive forgiveness of sins. Jesus’ mission was also to open the eyes of the blind. When He quoted Isaiah, He said, *He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and **recovery of sight to the blind*** (Luke 4:18). Here again the reference is not to physical eyes, but to spiritual understanding. In the same way, we read in Ephesians 1:18 that Paul says to the Christians in Ephesus, ‘I pray that the eyes of your understanding may be enlightened.’ The eyes of your spiritual understanding being opened.

Many people do not understand the gospel not because they lack intelligence, but because they have no spiritual perception. They are spiritually blind in the sense that they do not understand spiritual things. You may have physical sight. You may have intellectual sight. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that you have spiritual sight. You can have a perfect vision and be as blind as a bat when it comes to spiritual things. You can be a very intelligent person but you are unable to make sense of the spiritual truths of God. But when your spirit is alive, you have the capacity to know God and to know yourself in relation to God.

This is what we find in Proverbs 20:27 where man’s spirit is compared to a lamp. *The spirit of a man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all the inner depths of his heart.* The human spirit can have a certain knowledge of its condition and state in reference to God and to salvation. This helps us to understand the Lord’s teaching because we can see a parallel between the spirit and the eye. We realize that as the eye is to the body, the spirit of man is to his soul. Just as your eyes perceive material things, your spirit can perceive spiritual truths. And the Lord Jesus, in our passage, is talking about spiritual perception.

A clear vision

So it is about vision, whether physical or spiritual. Let’s continue to look at the meaning of this metaphor. We all know that the physical eyes can see sharply only if the vision is focused. If they are not focused, we have a blurred vision. That is why some people need glasses. Those of us who wear glasses can test that very easily. You take off your glasses and your vision is blurred. Why? Because your eyes do not focus well. And you have lenses in order to help your vision to become sharp and focused.

The same is true in the spiritual realm. When Jesus says, ‘If your eye is good,’ He means, ‘If your eye is single.’ That is the translation that you will find in the King James Bible. If you are going to see anything spiritually, then your vision must be single. And the word ‘single’, applied spiritually, means singleness of devotion, singleness of attention, singleness of heart.

The heart is sometimes equivalent to the eye in the Scriptures. To ‘set the heart’ and to ‘fix the eye’ on something are parallel expressions. An example of this is found in Psalm 119.

*Psalm 119:10. With my whole **heart** I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments.*

*Psalm 119:15. I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my **eyes** on your ways.*

In the same way, the Lord Jesus passes from the importance of having our heart in the right place in Matthew 6:21 to the importance of having an eye that is single in the following verse (v. 22). If you are going to see anything clearly in the spiritual life, you must focus totally upon God. Your eye

must be single. And singleness of the eye and heart means that you set your attention upon God for the purpose of doing His will. This is a fundamental principle of spiritual vision.

Diplopia

The opposite of single vision is of course double vision. The problem of double vision occurs when our two eyes do not look in the same direction. One eye is looking at an object and the other eye is looking at something else. And the result is that you see a single object as two objects. This can also happen with our spiritual vision. Instead of having our whole attention focused on God, we have one eye on God and another eye on the world. Your loyalty is divided between God and someone or something else. That is spiritual double vision.

In the immediate context of our passage, the other thing is called mammon, i.e., the riches of the world. The loss of vision is caused by the selfish ambition to lay up treasure for ourselves on earth. It plunges us into moral darkness. *But if your eye is bad* (if your eye is not single), *your whole body will be full of darkness*. Here the Lord Jesus deliberately uses the word ‘darkness’ because it is a picture of blindness in the Bible. You find that in Psalm 69:23 for example. *Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see*. Or in Acts 13:11 where we read that a magician was trying to oppose Paul. Paul had to deal severely with him and blindness came upon that magician. *A darkness fell upon him* (that is, he became blind), *and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand*.

When a man looks with a double interest upon both earthly and heavenly treasure, it makes him double minded. In fact, he is called a double-minded man in James 1:8. He is unstable in his commitment. The double-minded person, the man with spiritual double vision, this kind of person gets nowhere in the spiritual life. His whole life is in darkness.

The Lord Jesus warns us that we have to make a choice. A choice has to be made between serving God and serving material things. Every man without exception has committed his life to one of two treasures: mammon or God. His heart, his eyes are focused upon earthly things or upon heavenly things. And God does not accept a person who can’t make up his mind and end up giving his attention to both. You have to make a definite choice. You either serve God or you serve material things. But you cannot serve God and mammon at the same time. When two masters call upon a man at the same time, that person has to choose which master to favor. In cleaving to one, he automatically rejects the other.

You cannot have one foot in the kingdom of God and the other in the world. God does not accept the divided man. James says, *let not that man* (the double-minded person) *expect that he will receive anything from the Lord* (James 1:7). The only kind of Christian acceptable to God is the person who is totally committed to God, whose eye is single.

The light in you

So the warning is that we have to choose between God and mammon. The implication is obvious and it is this: make sure that you chose God instead of mammon. Now in the parallel passage in Luke, we have also a warning, which has some similarities with the one in Matthew. There in Luke 11:35, we read, *Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness*. This is preceded by v. 34, a verse that is almost identical to the passage in Matthew. *The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness* (Luke 11:34). And then comes the warning: *watch out that the light in you may not be darkness*. Be on the watch that what you take in is light, not darkness.

You see, every man thinks that he sees and that he has light. Every man thinks that what he sees, what he believes, what he perceives is the truth. Jesus tells us that it is not always the case. You may think that you see, but in reality you are in the dark. It is like a person who is nearsighted but he doesn't know that he is nearsighted. He thinks that he sees well, but in reality, his vision is blurred.

It is all a question of perception, whether we see with a healthy eye or a diseased eye. The good eye is the single eye, the eye that concentrates on seeing the light, the way of God and His righteousness. It can take in spiritual truth. The bad eye is the evil eye. It centers upon the world and material things. Its focus is on self and wealth.

What determines the health of the body, whether it is full of light or full of darkness depends on the content of what we perceive. In other words, what we are is related to what we take in and accept as true. That is why having healthy eyes is so important. If our eyes are good, we will see the light that Jesus offers. If our vision is clouded by evil, we will miss that light.

Jesus' light is shining forth upon all of us. If we don't see that light, it is not because the light is not there. It is because something is wrong with our eyes, our spiritual eyes. Our eyes are bad. And Jesus gives us this warning. Make sure that what you see is seen with a good eye. Make sure that what is in you is light and not darkness.

Our spiritual perception determines our spiritual fate. Therefore great care must be taken to respond to the light that leads to truth. Jesus is the light of the world and He has been placed for all to see. His teaching is given openly, but it must be received. We are responsible for our spiritual condition by how we respond to that light. If we take in Jesus' light, we will be spiritually healthy. We will be able to discern the choices of life with spiritual perception. We will be able to give off light, reflecting God's truth by the way we live. But rejection of that light has a tragic ending: it produces darkness and leads to certain destruction.

Wholly consecrated to the Lord

Here in Luke 11, we also find that notion of singleness. If something is single, it implies that it is whole. There is only one element, one piece, one unit. If your eyes are one way here and one way there, they cannot be wholly looking at both directions at the same time. Your vision is not in focus. But when it is single, when it is whole, i.e., completely concentrated in one direction, everything becomes clear. This word 'whole' appears twice in Luke 11:36.

*Luke 11:36. If therefore your **whole** body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it shall be **wholly** illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays.*

The original word for 'whole' is sometimes translated by the word 'complete.' So the person whose eye is single is also a person who is complete. His attention is totally directed towards God. This is the vital principle of spiritual vision. When your eye is wholly fixed upon God, no part of you is darkness. The light of God's truth will shine upon you with its rays and give you light.

Becoming a light to others

Jesus said to His disciples, 'You are the light of the world.' How do we become light? We become light when we are filled with light, when God's light floods into our hearts because we are concentrated upon Him. That is how we can function as light. That is how we can witness. We witness to people about Jesus with our life, with our whole being filled with God's light. This is the kind of light we want to give.

What do we say to the non-Christians? We tell them that the light is there. God is ready right now to let his light illuminate the life of anyone who desires to respond to Him. However, even though there is light, they are in darkness because they are spiritually blind. They can't see the things of God. Why? Because of sin. So long as sin has power over your life, you can't see the spiritual world. It is not because you lack intelligence. It is because sin and selfishness prevent you from seeing the glory of God.

If you come to Jesus, He will open your eyes. He is the light to which man must open the door of his dark heart. He is the light which man must take into his sinful life. This is done as you kneel down before Him and say, 'Lord, I am sorry. I confess my sins to You. Open my eyes that I may see.' God will touch your heart and you will begin to understand spiritual things. You will be filled with joy when you realize that you are beginning to understand the things you could not understand before. You are no longer in darkness because you have believed. The Lord Jesus declares in John 12:46, *I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness.* Spiritual vision then comes when you turn your eyes away from the world, away from self, away from materialism, and turn your eyes wholly upon God.

May God speak to each one of us and give us a clear perception of spiritual things. We want our eye to be single. We want to come to Jesus, the light of the world, with single-hearted devotion to Him.