

Seeing Clearly

Scripture: Matthew 6:22-23

Lesson Goal: To understand what Jesus taught concerning spiritual vision and spiritual blindness.

Introduction: Please begin today's lesson by reading the straightforward and graphic words of Proverbs 23:4-8, and then write the meaning of these verses in a brief summary.

The Believer's Bible Commentary offers us these words concerning today's Scripture passage:

Jesus realized that it would be difficult for His followers to see how His unconventional teaching on security for the future could possibly work. So He used an analogy of the human eye to teach on spiritual sight. He said that "the eye is the lamp of the body." It is through the eye that the body receives illumination and can see. If the eye is good, the whole body is flooded with light. But if the eye is bad, the vision is impaired. Instead of light, there is darkness.

The contrast is between a person that is blind and one that has sight; thus, a contrast between light and darkness in which they live.

(V22) "The lamp of the body is the eye."

The words of Jesus obviously are to teach His followers a spiritual lesson. He did not literally mean that the eye was a window letting light into all parts of the body. His words are a figure of speech (a metaphor) which means that "a word or phrase for one thing is used to refer to another thing in order to show or suggest that they are similar" (*Webster's Dictionary*).

In this part of the verse, Jesus is establishing the importance of the eye, or our ability to see. So much of life depends on the ability to see. As such, Jesus is helping His followers to understand the connection, or relationship, between the eye and the whole body. The ability to see illumines what the body does with hands and feet. Think on this question: What are some things in life that sight affords you the opportunity to do? How long has it been since you paused and sincerely thanked God for your sight?

There are some wonderful people around us who have not been blessed with sight, but are great testimonies for us as they serve the Lord with gladness. They develop and strengthen their other senses and faculties to counteract their lack of sight. I am reminded of my dear brother and friend Pastor Jerry McLain who serves faithfully as the shepherd of the West Point Baptist Church. Although his physical sight is absent, he continues to work, study, teach and preach the Word of God. His lack of physical eyesight has not in any way diminished his spiritual eyesight and insight.

You may have experienced, or at least witnessed, a teacher or instructor blindfolding a student for just a short time to help the student understand what it would be like to live without sight. After being turned around in circles for a few seconds, the blindfolded student walks cautiously and carefully while the other students watch from the peripheral of the classroom offering words of direction and instruction. The demonstration with the blindfold serves as an object lesson to help us understand our dependence on sight.

Personal Pastoral Testimony

It was a Friday evening in March, just a few years ago, when what I thought was a minor irritation in my left eye, caused by seasonal allergies, suddenly became serious. After tossing, twisting and turning for the

greater part of the night, I finally got out of bed and moved to another room, so I would not disturb Cindy for the entire night. Sometime just after midnight, I dropped off to sleep only to awaken at 2:00 a.m. with a strange discomfort in my left eye. I stumbled to the bathroom and turned on the light. Something was indeed wrong, but to be honest I was too scared to comprehend. I thought I must still be asleep, so therefore, my brain was simply not quite firing on all cylinders. I then turned on the light over the vanity and discovered what my brain was trying to tell me. I could not see out of my left eye. It was more than I just could not see out of that eye; I could not see light or anything else with the left eye. Cindy took the Maglite® flashlight and held it inches from my eye, but I could not see any light from it. Within just a few minutes, I was in the emergency room at Maury Regional Hospital under the care of Dr. Tim Gordon (optometrist). I was told that I had a severe infection caused by a virus which had attacked the cornea. He immediately began treating the eye with medications. I would like to tell you that I was brave and strong through all this. I would like to say that my faith was rock-solid, but the truth is that as I battled this infection, I was praying, "Please God do not let this infection go to my other eye. I can handle the loss of vision in one eye, but please not both eyes." During those days, God taught me about the blessing of the sight that I had taken for granted all my life. As I continued under treatment and the daily care of Dr. Gordon, I would have Cindy shine that Maglite flashlight in my left eye. Each time she shined it and I saw no light, the more concerned both she and I became. Dr. Gordon told us to be patient. The medications continued, some literally given hourly. Once, to break the daily routine, Cindy and I decided to go to Hardees. She drove, obviously! While in the Hardees drive-thru, waiting for our order, I saw just a tiny bit of light in my left eye for the first time. Cindy and I both cried and thanked God for the tiny amount of light I could see. With more medication and the outstanding care of Dr. Gordon, God healed my eye. Forgive me for being so lengthy with the testimony, but God truly taught me that I had not appreciated my blessing of sight until it was threatened by the infection.

Months later, as I write this lesson, I am praying for a young woman of our church family who has lost her sight. I am praying for God to heal her and for His special graces to fill her. I thank God for her strength and courage, for I truly remember how very weak I was during my short ordeal. But her strength is a testimony to God's faithfulness. Please join with me and pray for God's healing power to touch her eyes. It is my prayer that by the time you read this lesson, we can join together and thank God for the healing that has already occurred in her life.

(V22b) "If therefore your eye is good, your whole body is full of light."

John MacArthur writes:

The heart is the eye of the soul, through which the illumination of every spiritual experience shines. It is through our hearts that God's truth, love, peace and every other spiritual blessing comes to us. When our hearts, our spiritual eyes, are clear, then our whole body will be full of light.

The meaning of this portion of the verse is that if our eye, which represents the heart, is bad, our body will be full of darkness. If our hearts are blurred by material possessions and earthly treasures, then we may become blind to the importance of heavenly treasure and heavenly investments.

(V23) The "eye" that "is bad" represents the heart which is selfish and self-centered, the person that thinks only of himself and his own selfish ambitions and glorifications.

The greatest blindness is the blindness which thinks it is able to see clearly, but actually does not see at all.

Please read Matthew 23:16, 17, 19, 24, and 26. What is one truth you found in these verses that becomes the example of truth for today's lesson?

Jesus wants us to understand the danger of laying up earthly treasure while ignoring the eternal treasure. In simple terms, He wants us to have a pure heart that is clearly focused on what is important and lasting.

How can you keep your spiritual eyes clear and focused?

How do we obtain and maintain a pure heart? With proper consideration, please answer prayerfully.

Lesson 101—February 14, 2016

The Master of My Life

Scripture: Matthew 6:24

Lesson Goal: To learn the meaning of serving one master—Jesus.

Introduction: Jesus uses terminology and concepts which were familiar to His followers as He speaks of undivided loyalty in verse twenty-four. He uses the idea of a slave serving two masters and the impossibility of the idea. “A slave could belong to two partners but not to two separate individuals because his or her loyalty would be divided” (Rienecker). Slaves had no part in choosing an earthly master. Their master was chosen for them. Jesus is making a spiritual point to His followers that they have the opportunity to make a choice. They have the opportunity to make their own individual decision concerning the “master” of their lives.

What are some decisions you have made that reveal who you truly are?

(V24) “No one can serve two masters.” This would result in disloyalty. The word “serve” is the Greek word *douleuō*, derived from *doulos* which means “slave.” The word “masters” is *Kurios* from which we get our English word “lord.” The literal meaning of *Kurios* is “absolute owner.” Jesus is helping His followers understand that just as a slave cannot have two owners, we (His followers) cannot have two masters (lords). Jesus’ point of emphasis is that we cannot make material gain the Lord of our lives. “You cannot serve God and mammon.”

As defined by the *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, “mammon” taken from the Aramaic (the spoken language of Jesus), means “possessions, earthly goods, riches.” We, His followers, must make a decision on “what” or “who” will be given the greatest allegiance in our lives.

As with the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount, here Jesus’ speaks to the purity of an individual’s heart. Verse 24 ultimately speaks of the subject which rules the heart. Will the love of money or material possessions rule our hearts? If so, our life’s focus will be upon things of this life (V19). Or will Jesus rule

our hearts? If so, our life's focus will be upon eternal investments (V20). There is no easy, comfortable straddling-of-the-fence position. And straddling the fence is never comfortable (V21).

In your own words, what do you believe Jesus meant when He said, "No one can serve two masters"?

Personal Testimony

My wife, Cindy, after earning her R.N. degree at the University of Texas, Arlington, practiced in the medical field for a number of years. She continued her education and became one of the first Nurse Practitioners in Lawrence County. After working as a Nurse Practitioner for ten years, she felt the Lord's leading to become a high school science teacher. For the last ten years, she has taught at Lawrence County High School. She has often been asked: "Why would anyone leave the medical field to become a teacher? Why would anyone make such a change of profession? Did you not like the medical field?" To all the questions, Cindy's answer has remained constant. She enjoyed the medical professional and helping her patients. She enjoyed being a part of God's healing process. It was not a dissatisfaction or dislike of anything in the medical field; it was simply her heart's desire to make an impact and investment into young people's lives. She felt in her heart the place where she could make the most difference was in the high school setting. It was not about the difficulty or ease of a particular job. It was not about salary, or monetary gain or loss. It was about investing in young lives that in some way, somehow, could have a lasting, positive influence and would make a difference for eternity (see Matthew 6:19-20).

Warren Wiersbe gives us some insight into this section of "The Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 6:19-24): "If God grants riches, and we use them for His glory, then riches are a blessing. But if we will to get rich and live with that outlook, we will pay a great price for those riches."

Jim Elliot, Christian missionary who was killed January 8, 1959, at the age of 28, while sharing the Gospel with the people of Ecuador, wrote this in his journal on October 28, 1949: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose." Take a moment and check out the artifacts case in our sanctuary hallway. Have you heard their story?

Explain this quote in the light of Jim Elliot's life and death: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

What makes a person rich?

How does a follower of Jesus Christ gain true riches?

How does the world view riches?

Personal Testimony

Cindy and I were very blessed to know a great servant and warrior of Jesus Christ, Ms. Carrie Buford. When we first met and became acquainted with Ms. Carrie, she was in her eighties. She was a dear and precious saint of God. Ms. Carrie was one of twenty-one children and was the daughter and granddaughter of slaves. She lived to be just over 100 years of age. Her home literally consisted of a one-room wooden house. In the center of the room was a pot-belly stove. She used old newspapers as wallpaper. (Only by the grace of God was her house kept from catching on fire.) But if I have ever known a true “War Room,” this was it.

No doubt, Ms. Carrie’s background and life are quite unique. The point of her life, which I want to testify concerning, was her walk with Jesus Christ. She lived in sweet fellowship with Him every day. Ms. Carrie walked *so* close to Jesus. She found a blessed peace and contentment in Jesus Christ. She did not possess great riches or material possessions, but she was probably the richest lady I have ever known. She knew the Scriptures with little formal education. For her, the Word of God was more than words on a page. God’s Word was the light and lamp of her life. Her spirit was the very Spirit of Jesus Christ. Her prayers were prayed with an honesty and sincerity from the depths of a pure heart. She never knew great riches from the world, but I can only imagine what her mansion in heaven must look like. I look forward to seeing her again one day.

What made Ms. Carrie rich?

Please explain how it will be possible for your pastor to see Ms. Carrie again.

In your own words, what does it take to make one rich?

Please read and explain Matthew 16:26.

Lesson 102—February 21, 2016

The Worth of Worry

Scripture: Matthew 6:25

Lesson Goal: To learn the importance of trusting God and overcoming worry.

Introduction: Based upon the past lessons of Matthew 6:19-24, please prayerfully and thoughtfully answer these questions.

Which world are you living for?

Which master are you serving?

Jesus' words instruct us and serve as a constant reminder that we must choose which world we are truly living for and which master we are truly serving.

Please read Psalm 16:8 and Joshua 14:8.

John MacArthur explains, "We cannot claim Christ as Lord if our allegiance is to anything or anyone else, including ourselves."

(V25) "Therefore I say to you..." or "For this reason I say to you..."

Jesus begins this verse by referring us back to the previous verse/verses in which He declares the true loyalty of His followers, acknowledging the Lordship of only one Master – God. We must not minimize, or in any way make insignificant, the importance of Jesus' first words in verse 25. "Therefore I say to you" is all important to us, as we study the next verses of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Only when we have grasped with our minds the comparative durability of the two treasures, (verses 19-21) corruptible and incorruptible; the comparative usefulness of the two eye conditions (verses 22-23) light and darkness; and the comparative worth of the two masters (verse 24) God and mammon, are we ready to make our choice. And only when we have made our choice—for heavenly treasure, for light, for God—"therefore I say to you" (Stott).

Why do you think 16 of the 38 parables of Jesus deal with money?

What is your personal explanation for the fact that Scripture offers about 500 verses on prayer, fewer than 500 on faith, and over 2000 on money (Stott)?

"Worry," Greek, "*merimnate*" means "anxious" or "anxiety."

Questions for the Heart

Please read Matthew 6:33.

What are you really seeking in this life?

Where do your absolute honest loyalties lie?

Where are you spending your greatest investments of time, energy, finances and effort? And what is your ultimate goal for these investments?

What are your true heart motives of the aforementioned investments?

What does the truth of a pure heart reveal, as we answer the previous questions?

Jesus laid down the principle that our heart will be where our treasure is.

What does your heart truly seek?

How do you define “worry”?

John MacArthur states: “For believers to worry is to be disobedient and unfaithful to their Master, who is God. For Christians, worry and anxiety are forbidden, foolish, and sinful.”

(V25) “Do not worry about your life.”

Before we continue to look in depth at this passage, I would like to offer a scriptural observation. Jesus is not giving us these words, suggesting that we should not work and prepare for life. He is not condoning laziness, slothfulness or idleness. Please read Proverbs 27:23 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11.

Again, I remind you of one of my favorite sayings of life: “God gives every bird its food, but He doesn’t throw it into the nest.”

Understanding the truth of God’s provision for us as His followers, we must not worry about the necessities of life (V25)—“what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” We must remember the truth of one of God’s ancient names. He is our “Jehovah-Jireh,” which literally means: “the Lord who provides.” If we look back to Genesis 22:14, we find the God of provision. Please read Philippians 4:19.

What does Philippians 4:19 say to us as followers of Jesus Christ?

What does Philippians 4:19 NOT say to us as followers of Jesus Christ?

Do we ever get our needs and our wants mixed up?

An Important Thought

In verse 25, Jesus specifically mentions the most basic needs of life. He mentions what we “eat,” what we “drink,” and what we “put on.” As we think on these things, it is helpful to remember the day and time Jesus spoke these words. In the days of the Bible, food and water would not be taken for granted. Often there was a shortage of water, which brought a shortage of food, and thus affected all of life. In our day and time, most of us (western world believers) have these basic needs in such abundance that we often take them for granted.

The *Life Application Bible Commentary* tells us:

The command “do not worry” does not imply complete lack of concern, nor does it call people to be unwilling to work and supply their own needs. Instead, Jesus was continuing to highlight Kingdom priorities – the attitude toward life that His disciples should exemplify. They need not be overly concerned about food or clothing, because they know God will care for them. Because God sustains our lives and gives us our bodies, we can trust Him to provide the things He knows we need. When we worry over our lack of food or inadequate clothing, we immobilize ourselves and focus on the worry. We refuse to trust that God can supply these most basic needs. Worry immobilizes us, but trust in God moves us to action. We work for our money to supply food and clothing, but we must always remember that these ultimately come from God’s hands. Jesus made it clear that *worry* takes away from life rather than adding to it. We can counteract worry by doing what we can and trusting where we can’t. When we seek first to honor God as King and conform our lives to His righteousness, worry will always find us otherwise occupied.

This past week, did you spend more time worrying or praying?

How much sleep did you lose because of worry this past week?

What does worry accomplish in our lives?

What are the benefits of worry in your life?

Lesson 103—February 28, 2016

The Price of Worry

Scripture: Matthew 6:26-29

Lesson Goal: To better understand how worry not only affects our own lives but challenges the very trustworthiness of God Himself.

Introduction: Today we continue building upon last week's lesson, "The Worth of Worry." We find that worry is of no value to the follower of Jesus Christ. We have learned that dependence upon God and a true trust of God will prevent us from worrying. In today's Scripture, Jesus further expands the idea that, as His followers, we should not worry. He begins with an object lesson from the creative order of God.

(V26) "Look at the birds of the air."

It is very possible that Jesus literally called his listeners' attention to some passing birds. There are various and numerous kinds of birds in Northern Galilee. Jesus' emphasis, based upon His example, is the fact of God's provision.

The phrase "look at" means more than just a glance. It means "to consider" or "to give thought to." Truly think about how God has given provision to the birds of the air. As you observe a bird in flight, think about God's provision for the simplest of His creation. For the birds aren't created in His image or recreated through the transforming power of Jesus Christ. God makes provision for the birds of the air, but His eternal promises are made to men (His children).

Said the robin to the sparrow,
"I should really like to know,
Why these anxious human beings
Rush about and worry so."

Said the sparrow to the robin,
"Friend I think that it must be,
That they have no Heavenly Father,
Such as cares for you and me."
(Elizabeth Cheney)

We may smile, or even chuckle, at the lines of this simple poem, but could it be an accurate assessment and reflection of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:25-34?

Even as I write this lesson, God's Spirit reminds me of the fact that I miss so many of the simple, yet wonderful lessons God desires to teach me daily.

How long has it been since you paused to watch a bird in flight? Have you *ever* paused in your busy, hurried life to listen to a bird's song as he perches on a power line? Have you ever stopped to notice the bright red cardinals sitting in a cedar tree? For me personally, this scene is even better than a Hallmark Christmas card. Have you ever stopped to watch a flock of Canada Geese in flight and to listen to their honk as they communicate with one another? Have you ever watched the tiny hummingbird beating his wings at what appears to be super turbo speed while fluttering near the freshly blooming honeysuckle? Have you ever witnessed the strength of the red-tailed hawk in flight or been frightened by the sudden and unexpected hoot of a barn owl? Have you ever witnessed the bold strut of a wild turkey or seen the majestic soar of a golden eagle? Each of these and thousands of others serve as our teachers of the divine hand of our Creator.

Martin Luther wrote these words generations ago:

He is making the birds our schoolmasters and teachers. It is a great and abiding disgrace to us that in the Gospel, a helpless sparrow should become a theologian and a preacher to the wisest of men. Whenever you listen to a nightingale, therefore, you are listening to an excellent preacher.... It is as if it were saying, "I prefer to be in the Lord's kitchen. He has made heaven and earth, and He Himself is the cook and the host. Every day He feeds and nourishes innumerable little birds of his hand."

As we observe God's care for His creatures, how much more should we see His provision for His children?

Important Truth

I must again remind all the readers of today's lesson that Scripture teaches us of the provision of God. Jesus uses examples of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field to remind us of God's touch and provision. However, as we study these verses, we should completely understand the truth of God's provision offered to us in the Scripture. As we understand this truth of God's provision, we understand that God has ordained work for those who can work as a blessing of His provision for our lives. God has chosen not to feed most of us as He did Elijah by means of angels and ravens. He has ordained and blessed us to be able to work to provide the basic provisions for our lives.

Another very important truth for us is the biblical principle that I call "where much is given, much is expected." As followers of Jesus Christ, blessed and graced of God, we should always remember our responsibility and privilege to reach out to others who struggle with the basic ingredients of life, such as food, water, clothing and shelter. God's divine design often is to use us (followers of Jesus Christ) to be His agents to feed the hungry and clothe the naked.

How much are we using the vast blessings or God's provision in our lives to help others?

What are some ways that we can honor God by being His instruments or agents to help others be blessed by His provisions?

The Truth of Senseless Worry

(V27) What can worry accomplish? What benefit is there to worry in a believer's life? True, the value and benefit of worry is zero, but what are some results of worry?

Can you list some possible results of worry in a person's life?

The question posed by Jesus in verse 27 gives us two distinct but similar thoughts.

1. One interpretation renders this verse to mean "height." Who can add length to his body, become taller by worry?
2. "Stature" is rendered and interpreted to be "age," thus, can we add to our allotted lifespan by worrying or being anxious about it?

In your lifetime, what has worry done for you?

What has worry cost you?

Dr. Charles Mayo writes: “Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands and the whole nervous system. I have never met a man or known a man to die of overwork, but I have known a lot who died of worry.”

(V28) In this example and illustration, Jesus directs His listeners’ attention to the beauty of the lilies of the field. These lilies were beautiful, gorgeous wildflowers that bloomed in cultivated gardens of Galilee, as well as in the fields and uncultivated hillsides of Palestine. If the creator, with His special and delicate touch, can so make the beauty of this lowly flower, then should we as His children be able to trust Him for our needs of life.

(V29) Jesus compares the splendor and glory of the lilies of the field with the glory of Solomon.

Most of us, me included, have rarely taken the time to see the wonderful beauty and detail God gives to flowers. Jesus tells us that King Solomon, in all his clothed splendor, could not compare to these flowers fashioned by the hand of God.

John MacArthur writes:

It is an indictment of our day that we spend so much time, money, and effort to dress ourselves. Lusting after costly, stylish clothes is sinful because its only purpose is to feed pride. Many people have made a god out of fashion and shamelessly waste money on expensive clothes they will wear but a few times. But if God bothers to array the grass of the field with beautiful but short-lived flowers, how much more is He concerned to clothe and care for His very own children who are destined for eternal life?

Worry ultimately shows our lack of faith.

Worry ultimately strikes at the trustworthiness of God.

Worry ultimately is a tool satan uses to bring doubt and defeat into our lives.

Worry ultimately is used by satan to push God out of our minds.

Please read Ephesians 1:18-19.