

Before we begin our consideration of what God is teaching us in today’s passage. I want us to back up for a moment and take a look at the “big picture” of what is being taught in this sixth chapter of Matthew.

CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6 focuses on our relationship to God. Jesus rightly considers this to be a critical part of our kingdom citizenship. Will we live for Him? Will we fully trust Him?

6:1 begins by speaking of “practicing your righteousness.” Will we live for Him? To show how we should, Jesus then teaches on the three pillars of being right before God - benevolent giving (Tzedaka), focused prayer (Tefillah) and designated denial (Teshuva). The center piece of this teaching is what we call “The Lord’s Prayer,” where in the middle of the prayer it says “*give us this day our daily bread*.” It appears to me that the second half of chapter 6, beginning in verse 19, is an extended teaching on God’s answer to that prayer – about God’s PROVISION. Yes, we can trust Him fully, because God is our gracious provider – Jehovah Jirah.

Pastor David has begun this portion on PROVISION by teaching us (1) don’t be short-sighted regarding provision; rather, seek lasting heavenly treasure above seeking earthly treasure (6:19-21). Then we learned (2) don’t be double-minded in your seeking of provision; rather trust God alone, not earthly treasure.

Chapter 6 goes on to teach (as we will see in subsequent lessons), (3) don’t be anxious about provision, for God will surely provide. And the conclusion of the matter we will discover in 6:33: “*But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*.”

Well, that is my overview or “big picture” of Chapter 6. But now we are left with today’s passage in the midst of this teaching on provision that appears at first glance to be out of context. In fact, many commentators have suggested that it is indeed so. But as we are convinced that all Scripture is inspired by God, including the order given in the original manuscripts, we must look deeper to find the related meaning.

TODAY’S TEXT

Matthew 6:22-23 *The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, 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 that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

LUKE’S COMPANION VERSES

Luke 11:34-36 *The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness. If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays.*

TRAIN OF THOUGHT ON PROVISION

6:19-21 (1) Don’t be short-sighted - seek lasting heavenly treasure

6:22-23 ?

6:24 (2) Don’t be double-minded - trust God, not material things

6:25-32 (3) Don’t be anxious - God will provide

6:33 SUMMARY: Seek first God’s kingdom

It makes sense that verses 22-23 must connect somehow to the provision of God and His kingdom (light) vs. the alternative provision of the world and its material wealth (darkness)

THE EYE IS THE LAMP OF THE BODY

So what does this mean?

The passage goes on to intimate that the eye either brings light or darkness into the body. Well, we know that “light” is typically a metaphor for “goodness” or “godliness” and “darkness” is a metaphor for “sin” or “ungodliness.”

And the eye of the body is that which discerns physical light or darkness. And metaphorically, it is the eye that “sees” or “discerns” or “perceives” that which is “taken in.” In the sense that the physical eye lets physical light into the body, it can be called the “lamp of the body.” In a metaphorical sense “eye” can be the mind or the heart, such as in “open the eyes of my heart” or “open up my mind” to the things of God.

Just as dirty or distorted window will affect the amount and quality of light let into a room, so a dirty or distorted mind and heart will affect the perception let into the soul.

If the eye be “clear” is literally “single” as in single-minded, speaking of being pure and untainted. In this way it is relating to what Jesus says in verse 24 about serving only one Master – undivided in loyalty and single-minded in focus.

ROSE-COLORED GLASSES

We all know the expression of “seeing through rose-colored glasses,” and it is not a designation that is complimentary. For it speaks of seeing things from a false or distorted perspective, causing one to see something as “rosy” or beautiful that might not be so beautiful. When Jesus is speaking of the eye that is “bad” he is speaking of perceiving life incorrectly.

So what can distort or cloud our correct perception of truth?

1. PREJUDICE of any kind would be the prime culprit. The lens of personal opinion, colored by our race, gender, politics, social class or even spiritual upbringing can cause us to incorrectly perceive – sometimes justifying that which is bad as good, or judging that which is good to be bad.
2. JEALOUSY also causes a “dirty” and distorted lens of perception. When we don’t see another with the untainted loving eyes of a loving God, we will misrepresent in our assessment. The word translated “clear” or “single” of the healthy eye can also be translated “generous.” And we need a generous eye of love and mercy to see as God sees.

Matthew 20:15 *Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?*

This is the envious eye that cannot see the beauty of generosity and grace and is jealous for another’s fortune. It is the eye that is blind to the ways of God and sees more of what would be beneficial to self.

3. CONCEIT will also cause a wrong perception. For when we see ourselves as better than another we will not judge the world properly. That is why the apostle Paul urged the Philippians to “do nothing from selfishness of empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3)

THE EVIL EYE

It may well be that Jesus’ comments also relate to a proverb:

Proverbs 28:22 *A man with an evil eye hastens after wealth and does not know that want will come upon him.*

The ancient world thought of the “evil eye” as more than just a mean look. It was believed that some people possessed an evil eye capable of bringing woe and evil upon another just by looking at them. And certainly those with an evil eye would bring inevitable disaster upon themselves.

Many translations of this Proverb translate “evil eye” as “greedy eye,” for it is the greedy eye that “hastens after wealth. In Matthew 6:23 some translate as “But if your eye is evil ...” So the connection might well be that the eye that “hastens after wealth” is the eye that brings darkness into the soul, whereas the implication would be that the eye that is “clear” or “single(minded),” focusing on God and His kingdom alone, is the eye that brings light into the soul. This would make perfect sense in context.

AN INSTUCTIVE EYE EXERCISE

I want to attempt to illustrate the spiritual principle of these verses with an exercise of your eyes. Now you must “play along” with me in this for it to be effective. In doing what I ask, try not to alter your facial expressions, but just your eyes and the muscles immediately around your eyes. I have four “looks” I want your eyes to emulate.

1. First, let your eyes show love and receptivity. Look through your eyes as if you are looking at someone you love and adore deeply.
2. Now let your eyes show happiness and joy. Smile with your eyes.
3. OK. Now thirdly, let your eyes show fear and distrust. Focus on something that frightens you.
4. And lastly, let your eyes show disdain or hatred. Come on, give the “evil eye.”

The exercise is over, but I want you to evaluate the difference of your eyes in #1 and 2 versus 3 and 4.

Did you not feel your eyes relaxed and open when loving and even more when smiling? Was it not as though more light could come through?

And when fearful of disdainful, did you not feel your eyes close more, becoming restrictive? Was there not a sense of tightening and tensing, as if barring light to come in?

This exercise illustrates in a physical way what Jesus is speaking of in a metaphorical way. When your “eye” is clear – that is, uninhibited, open and welcoming with no obstruction of prejudice, jealousy or conceit, then the light of goodness and generosity fills the soul.

But when the “eye” is bad or evil – that is, judgmental, unforgiving and hostile, then the soul fills with the darkness of sinfulness and stinginess.

HOW GREAT IS THE DARKNESS!

Jesus’ last words in our passage is *“if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”*

I believe this speaks of deceiving oneself. When my prejudice, jealousy or conceit distorts truth, I am not only misrepresenting truth, I am deceiving myself into thinking good is bad or bad is good, and that is blasphemy. That is taking God’s view of truth and turning it upside down. This is not looking through “rose-colored glasses” but looking through totally distorted glasses. This is sin multiplied. And how great is that darkness!

So keep your spiritual lens unclouded. Strive to see and perceive things with God’s lens of truth. Use the Bible, use good Christian counsel and teaching, use many counselors. Test your choices and reactions before blurting them out in ignorance. “What would Jesus do?”

As Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 10:16: *“be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves.”*

And heed these words of wisdom from the wisest man who ever lived (apart from our Savior):

Proverbs 12:15 *The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel.*

Proverbs 21:2 *Every man’s way is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts.*

Proverbs 27:1-2 *Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. Let another praise you, and not your own mouth.*

MY SUGGESTED PERSONAL TRANSLATION OF Matthew 6:22-23

“Just as the physical eye is that which lets physical light into the body, so the clear and God-devoted discerning “eye” of my mind and heart is what lets spiritual light flood into my life. But if the perceiving “eye” of my mind and heart is clouded by prejudice, jealousy or conceit, then God’s light is restricted or even blocked, and I will find myself full of spiritual darkness. And if I deceive myself into thinking that I have the light of truth, when I truly have the darkness of misperception, how dangerous, onerous and truly dark is my sin!”

AN APPROPRIATE CLOSING PRAYER, BORROWING FROM PAUL

Ephesians 1:18-19a *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe.*