

The Sermon on the Mount Part 16: Two Eyes and Two Masters Matthew 6:22-24

Thesis: We are a people who follow Jesus, who listen to the voice of God, and who get in action around what the Lord is saying through the power of his Holy Spirit.

Text: Matthew 5 – 7

The Sermon on the Mount is one of the most famous passages in the Bible. People refer to it and quote from this teaching of Jesus all the time.

These words of Jesus are revolutionary, radical, and relational (righteousness). I wonder if the words of Jesus have lost their cutting edge in our lives because of familiarity.

God is showing me wonderful things from his Word. And, the Lord is using The Sermon on the Mount to transform me.

So, I am asking the Lord to encourage you by his Holy Spirit and to speak to us as we spend time on Matthew 5 – 7 over the next months.

What we have considered so far in our time looking at The Sermon on the Mount.

In a message 11'10'24, we worked on **an overview** of The Sermon on the Mount.

Then, we looked at Matthew 5:3-5: **The Poor in Spirit, The Grieved, and The Unimportant** on 11'17'24.

In a message on 11'24'24, we looked at Matthew 5:6-8: **The Hungry, The Merciful, and The Pure in Heart.**

In a message on 7'13'25, we considered Matthew 5:9-12: **The Peacemakers, The Persecuted, and the Misunderstood.**

In a message on 7'20'25, **we finished looking at our kingdom identity from Matthew 5:9-16: The Peacemakers, The Persecuted, and the Misunderstood.** We also sought to understand three illustrations of the way we show up in this world as a part of our kingdom identity: as salt, light, and a city on a hill.

In a message on 7'27'25, we looked at Matthew 5:17-20. **Jesus came to fulfill the Torah.** Jesus' teaching on righteousness brings the Torah to its completion.

In a message on 11'16'25, we looked at Matthew 5:21-26 which dealt with **murder and angry contempt.** True righteousness means treating every human as an image of God who is to be loved and respected.

In a message on 11'30'25, we looked at Matthew 5:27-30 which dealt with adultery and lust. The Old Testament law about adultery reveals God's wisdom about how we reduce people to objects of desire. **Jesus invites us to view every human being as an image of God who is to be honored in our actions and imaginations.**

In a message on 2'22'26, we looked at Matthew 5:31-32 which dealt with divorce and remarriage. Jesus sides with the interpreters teaching that a man may not divorce his wife for just any reason he chooses. **The Lord calls out the harm that is done to women in this scenario by identifying them as the victims of adultery.**

In a message on 3'15'26, we looked at Matthew 5:33-37, which dealt with oaths and telling the truth. Instead of seeking to embellish our words and to trying to manipulate others by making religious sounding oaths, **Jesus calls us to embrace honesty, telling the truth, and integrity.**

In a message on 3'22'26, we looked at Matthew 5:38-48, which dealt with retaliation (revenge) and enemy love. **Regarding retaliation, Jesus raises the bar when he says to respond to revenge and retaliation with creative nonviolence.** Jesus is not telling us to do nothing. Rather, Jesus raises the bar in his kingdom for creative and nonviolent responses that open the door for real peace. **Regarding enemy love, Jesus commands us to love our enemies.** It may sound crazy, but Jesus is saying that bold generosity can subvert the power games of our world and even turn enemies into friends.

In a message on 4'15'26, we looked at Matthew 6:1-18, which dealt with warnings about religious practices. Jesus focuses on doing right by God as he describes three common religious practices—giving, praying, and fasting. Jesus warns us about engaging in spiritual practices in a hypocritical, performative way to be seen by others. Instead, **Jesus encourages true devotion born out of a desire for intimacy with God and alignment with his will.**

In a message on 4'26'26, we looked at Matthew 6:9-15, in which Jesus gives us The Lord's Prayer. Praying the Lord's Prayer is one way to make Jesus' story our own story. **Over time, the prayer forms us into people who trust God daily, love and forgive others, and participate in the good work that unites Heaven and Earth.**

In a message on 5'17'26, we continued our look at Matthew 5:9-15 on The Lord's Prayer. Jesus taught his disciples to pray. **The Model Prayer (The Lord's Prayer) is a way to pray according to the will of God.** You don't always have to pray through every part of the Lord's Prayer. Sometimes, you will simply pray the model prayer itself. Sometimes, you will use each part of the model prayer as a launching pad for prayer. Sometimes, you will focus on one part or another.

In a message on 6'14'26, we looked at Matthew 6:19-21, in which **Jesus urges his followers to focus on loving God and others instead of wealth.** Our possessions can master us, demand our attention, and distract us. But trusting God and focusing on what he values will allow us to be free and generous. Jesus discourages his followers from storing up things that can easily wear out, get eaten by pests, or be stolen by thieves. Earthly wealth can make us feel safe, but Jesus says it is an illusion that won't last. Instead, Jesus urges to store up treasures in heaven by prioritizing the well-being and care of others, serving in the name of Jesus, and loving our neighbor.

As we make this journey, here is an important perspective to keep in mind:

As we look at The Sermon on the Mount, I will share with you what I am learning and processing, some of which is new to me. But please understand: The Lord can speak to you through his Word without all this teaching I am doing and without all the research we are processing. **What we are doing together is to help us enter into the context of this Word, and to let the Lord speak to us in our current context.** The Lord can do that through the Holy Spirit whenever you open God's word and read it devotionally or study it thoroughly. **Getting into God's Word and listening for The Voice is one of the most important spiritual practices the Lord has given us for growing in our relationships with God and others.** I pray that our time in The Sermon on the Mount will stir in you a **greater love for God, for God's word, and for the leadership of Jesus in your life.**

Consider While Reading:

The first hearers of these words were mostly low-status, powerless Israelites on the fringes of mainstream society ([The Bible Project](#), Weekly Playlist, January 1-7). They were the impoverished, the infirmed, the unimportant, the oppressed, and the ignored.

Overview:

"The introduction (5:3-16) announces the surprising and counterintuitive identity of those who are a part of God's Kingdom. Then comes the main body of teachings (5:17-

7:12), where Jesus explains further what he means when he calls his followers to be 'righteous.' Finally, Jesus concludes the sermon (7:13-27) by calling people to make a choice about how they're going to respond" ([The Bible Project](#), Weekly Playlist, January 1-7).

The Sermon on the Mount is carefully designed and organized.

1. **There are 3 main parts to The Sermon on the Mount.**
 - a. The middle part is divided into 3 parts.
 - b. Each of the parts of the middle part is divided into 3 parts.
 - c. Right at the center of the center of The Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's Prayer.
2. **The Bible tells us what it means for God's Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven.**
 - a. The kingdom of God coming to earth is the one of the main themes of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.
3. **From the beginning, humans rebelled and started to build their own kingdom by their own wisdom.**
4. **So, God chose one family, Israel, to join him in his mission.**
 - a. And, God offered them his wisdom.
 - b. That wisdom was called the Torah—the teaching.
 - c. Beginning on with Moses on Mt. Sinai, God entered into a covenant with Isreal.
 - d. The goal was for Israel, one nation, to be transformed by God's wisdom, so that they could represent God's Kingdom before all the nations and to lead the nations back to God.
5. **In Jesus' day, the kingdom of God was nowhere to be seen.**
 - a. Instead, Israel was under the rule of the Roman Empire and Roman oppressors.
6. **So, why wasn't God's Kingdom coming?**
 - a. Some religious leaders-- the **Pharisees**-- believed Israel was not being faithful enough to the Torah.
 - b. Other religious leaders—the **Sadducees**—said it would be best if Israel found a way to cooperate with Rome. They were the power brokers in Jesus' day.
 - c. Some people ran to the hills to become freedom fighters against Rome. They were known as the **Zealots**.
 - d. Others **withdrew to the desert**, waiting for God to use them to start the new Israel.
7. **But walk around the country of Israel, like Jesus did in his day, and here is what you would find.**

- a. You would find mostly normal people.
 - b. They were trying to figure out how to live their lives as best they can.
 - c. Most people were living in poverty and were carving out a subsistence living.
 - d. There were lots of poor and sick people.
 - e. They were oppressed by high taxes.
 - f. Rome had taken their land away from them.
 - g. Most people were struggling to pay the heavy taxes imposed on them by their Roman occupiers.
 - h. In essence, the people of Jesus' day were powerless and hopeless.
8. **Jesus went to these people** healing the sick, setting free the demonized, mending broken hearts, and bringing salvation.
- a. Jesus came with good news.
 - b. And, Jesus told these people that the kingdom of God was arriving.
 - c. People came from all over to hear his teaching and to get healing, deliverance, and encouragement.
9. **One day, Jesus went up to a tall hill or small mountain and said, "The arrival of kingdom of God is starting here and now with you."**
- a. The kingdom of God was starting with the powerless, the weak, and the nobodies.
 - b. Where can you go to see God's presence and blessing?
 - i. You see God's presence and blessing among the poor in spirit, the crushed, and the defeated.
 - ii. The kingdom of God was not coming first among the wealthy and the powerful.
 - iii. The kingdom of God was coming to the people standing right before Jesus.

The structure of The Sermon on the Mount:

There are **3 main sections** to The Sermon on the Mount.

1. **Main Section 1: Matthew 5:3 – 16. This is the introduction. Jesus tells us about the kingdom identity of his followers. Jesus gives 9 sayings about who is experiencing the good life of God's kingdom.**
 - a. Matthew 5:3 – 12. The Good Life.
 - i. The Poor in Spirit (3).
 - ii. The Grievors (4).
 - iii. The Unimportant (5).
 - iv. The Hungry (6).
 - v. The Merciful (7).

- vi. The Pure in Heart (8).
- vii. The Peacemakers (9).
- viii. The Persecuted (10).
- ix. The Misunderstood (11-12).
- b. Matthew 5:13. Salt of the Earth.
 - i. "In the Hebrew Scriptures, salt is a symbol of God's long-lasting covenant relationship with Israel. So Jesus is claiming that he and his followers are carrying Israel's covenant relationship to its fulfillment" ([The Bible Project](#), Weekly Playlist, January 1-7).
 - ii. Salt is an important preservative.
 - iii. Salt is a seasoning. We are to bring out the God-flavors in this world (MSG).
 - iv. A little salt goes a long way. Christians are supposed to influence rather than be influenced by the ways of this world.
- c. Matthew 5:14 – 16. The Light of the World and a city on a hill.
 - i. According to Isaiah, one day the inhabitants of Jerusalem will reflect God's light, peace, and blessing out to all the world.
 - ii. Jerusalem is the image of the city on a hill that shines for all the world to see. We are a part of that family, heritage, and kingdom.
 - iii. Light shines in the darkness and overcomes darkness. Christians have influence way beyond themselves.
 - iv. We are to bring out the God-colors in this world (MSG).
 - v. When Jesus calls his followers "the light of the world" and "a city on a hill," he is referencing images from the prophet Isaiah. The shining city on the hill portrays God's wisdom and heavenly presence emanating from Jerusalem and filling the whole Earth. By using these images, Jesus is applying Isaiah's prophecies to himself and his followers ([The Bible Project](#)).
- 2. **Main Section 2: Matthew 5:17 – 7:12. This is the main body of teaching. In this section, Jesus tells us what he means for his followers to be righteous. Righteousness is living in right relationship with God and others. It is a character trait that creates justice and peace in the world.**
 - a. **Section 1 of the Middle Section: Matthew 5:17 – 48. In this section, Jesus tells us how this righteousness relates to the Torah.**
 - i. Matthew 5:17 – 20. Jesus fulfills the Torah.
 - 1. Jesus' teaching on righteousness brings the Torah to its completion.
 - ii. Matthew 5:21 – 47. Jesus gives six case studies on how the righteousness of Jesus fulfills the Torah.
 - 1. Anger, lust, divorce, telling the truth, revenge, and enemy love.

- iii. Matthew 5:48. Summary: be complete or whole. The purpose of the Torah is teaching people God's wisdom so that they can become mature, whole people who spread God's blessing to the world.
 - 1. Being complete or whole links back to what Jesus says: living by Jesus' teachings will fulfill the Torah and Prophets.

b. Section 2 of the Middle Section: Matthew 6:1 – 18. In this section, Jesus tells us how this righteousness relates to religious practices.

- i. Matthew 6:1. Living in right relationship with God and other results in a reward.
 - 1. But be careful: If you are doing your righteousness to get public praise, you will miss out on the real reward God has in store.
- ii. Matthew 6:2 – 18. Three examples of how religious devotion can go astray.
 - 1. Generosity to the poor.
 - 2. Prayer.
 - 3. Fasting.

iii. Matthew 6:19 – 21. True wealth: the real reward.

- 1. The real reward links back to Matthew 6:1. The reward is knowing and being love by God.

c. Section 3 of the Middle Section. Matthew 6:19 – 7:12. In this section, Jesus tells us how this righteousness is expressed in right relationships with God and with neighbor. Doing righteousness affects our relationship with God and neighbor.

- i. Matthew 6:19 – 34. God and money.
 - 1. Our stuff tends to claim our allegiance and causes us to worry.
 - 2. Our relationship to our stuff can be one of the biggest obstacles to healthy relationships with God and others.
 - 3. Store up treasure in heaven.
 - 4. **Parable 1: Two eyes.** You can have a healthy, generous eye, or an evil, stingy eye.
 - 5. **Parable 2: Two masters you can serve—God or money.**
 - 6. Teaching on worry. We are invited to trust the generous God of creation who cares about us.
- ii. Matthew 7:1 – 11. God and neighbor.
 - 1. Teaching on not judging others.
 - 2. Parable 1: Speck and log.
 - 3. Parable 2: Holy pearls—using discernment when we try to help and correct others.

4. Ask God for the wisdom you need: ask, seek, and knock.
 - iii. Matthew 7:12. The Golden Rule.
3. **Main Section 3:** Matthew 7:13 – 27. In his conclusion, **Jesus calls people to make a choice as to how they are going to respond.**
 - a. The choice for how we will live our lives.
 - i. Matthew 7:13 – 14. Two paths with two different gates. One leads to life; the other leads to ruin.
 - ii. Matthew 7:15 – 23. Two trees. Discerning between two kinds of leaders who claim to represent God. One tree is good; one is not.
 - iii. Matthew 7:24 – 27. Two types of houses you can build. You can ignore Jesus and build your house by your own wisdom. Or, you can listen to Jesus and build your house on the rock.
4. **Finally, every one of these parts has 3 parts.**
 - a. There is a lot of design in the structure of The Sermon on the Mount.
5. **Review of The Sermon on the Mount:**
 - a. **Kingdom Identity:** the sermon begins with a surprise announcement about how the good life of the kingdom of God has come to the least likely people.
 - b. **A Greater Righteousness:** in the main body, Jesus teaches how to do right by God and others.
 - c. **The Choice:** the conclusion calls for a decision. In light of what Jesus has said, what choice will you make?

Here is what Jesus is saying through The Sermon on the Mount.

1. God's Kingdom comes to Earth through Jesus.
2. In God's Kingdom, love, justice, and peace prevail.
3. This Kingdom is arriving first to ordinary people—the poor, the powerless, and the outsider ([The Bible Project](#), Weekly Playlist, January 1-7).

Prayer:

1. Lord, I pray that you speak to us, encounter us, and grant to us your Spirit of wisdom and revelation that we might know you better.
2. Bless our time in your word together corporately.
3. Bless our time in your word individually as a part of our spiritual practices.
4. Help us to hear your voice, God, by the power of your Holy Spirit.
5. Help us to fall more and more in love with you, and help us to join Jesus on his mission together with others in our spheres of influence.

6. May we be a people who follow Jesus, who listen to the voice of God, and who get in action around what the Lord is saying through the power of his Holy Spirit.

Today, we continue looking at Section 3 of the Middle Section of the Sermon on Mount. Matthew 6:19 – 7:12. In this section, Jesus tells us how this righteousness is expressed in right relationships with God and with neighbor. Doing righteousness affects our relationship with God and neighbor.

In Matthew 6:19 – 34, Jesus talks about God and money.

1. Our stuff tends to claim our allegiance and causes us to worry.
2. Our relationship to our stuff can be one of the biggest obstacles to healthy relationships with God and others.
3. Jesus calls us to store up treasure in heaven.
4. **Parable 1: Two eyes.** You can have a healthy, generous eye, or an evil, stingy eye.
5. **Parable 2: Two masters you can serve**—God or money.
6. At the end of Matthew 6, Jesus teaches us about worry. We are invited to trust the generous God of creation who cares about us.

Two Eyes and Two Masters

Matthew 6:22–24 (NIV84) 22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

[BibleProject Guide: Wealth and Worry](#)

[The teaching and way of life of Jesus of Nazareth] began to reunite God's domain with our domain. He calls this reunion the arrival of the Kingdom of the skies [heaven]. And Jesus invites people to follow him so that they can enter into that heavenly realm here on Earth in their day-to-day lives.

As humans, we desire divine experiences like love, peace, safety and security, but we face obstacles on the path to these rewards. In fact, Jesus says the biggest obstacle to experiencing God's heavenly life and presence is our stuff! Possessions and wealth may make us feel more stable and secure, but Jesus has a different perspective on material things.

The Big Idea

Jesus urges his followers to love God and others—not wealth. Possessions, like masters, command our attention and distract us. But by trusting our generous creator and focusing on what God values, we can become more free and content.

Key Themes

- The human tendency to trust in wealth and possessions
- How generosity leads to life and greed leads to death
- The inability to live for God and wealth at the same time
- Worrying about money and resources
- Average life versus life in God's Kingdom

The Lamp of the Body

In Matthew 6:21, Jesus declares that *“where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* In other words, we ought to focus our hopes and desires on what matters most. When we do this, we will become more free, generous, and alive.

In his next teaching, Jesus uses a vivid image to describe this kind of focus.

Matthew 6:22 (NASB) “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.”

This phrase, “good eye,” is a figure of speech in the Hebrew Bible for being generous, while a “bad eye” is a metaphor for being stingy, hoarding your stuff. Jesus warns that a bad eye is the quickest way to ruin yourself.

Matthew 6:23 (NASB) “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

Does Jesus mean we should give all our stuff away? Well, Jesus does tell one wealthy man to do just that (see Matthew 19:16-30). But ultimately, this teaching is about our priorities and how we relate to others. When we love only ourselves, we see our stuff as something to hoard and protect. But when we love others, we can see our possessions and resources as blessings for everyone around us.

Parable 1: Two Eyes

Let's unpack a little further what Jesus says about the lamp of the body and two eyes.

[What Matthew 6:22-23 \(The Eye Is the Lamp of the Body\) Means](#)

Jesus appears to develop the "eye as a lamp metaphor" from the Hebrew Bible, where the authors often describe eyes as either a source of light or a place where light resides.

Jesus appeals to these various depictions of light and dark eyes to convey at least two main points in his teaching. First, he says that generous people remain full of light like a lamp—vibrant and even happy with love for their neighbors. Second, he connects the concept of unloving stinginess to dim or dark eyes, suggesting that the stingy person has dim or darkened eyes and will experience a continuous decline into lonesome isolation and painful darkness.

Isn't Wealth a Gift from God?

The bad-eyed, stingy way of life is full of darkness, Jesus says, and he uses his parable about the rich man and Lazarus as an illustration (see Luke 16:19-31).

Luke 16:19–31 (NIV84) 19 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the

Prophets; let them listen to them.’ 30 “ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ 31 “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

The rich man has a bad eye because he lives solely for himself and the comforts of his wealth, while neglecting to care for Lazarus’ needs.

But wait. Isn’t wealth a sign of God’s favor?

Some listening to Jesus’ story surely think that the rich man’s luxurious possessions display clear evidence of God’s favor and blessing. But in the biblical narrative, prosperity and wealth are often signs of brutal injustice toward the vulnerable.

Throughout his teaching, Jesus tells us that true, wonderful experiences of life have almost nothing to do with owning stuff. Jesus lived in poverty and experienced the good life at its fullest because the good life God offers is found in love for one’s neighbor.

Wealth itself is neither light nor darkness, but loving wealth is darkness. And to love wealth instead of neighbor is to switch off the eye-lamp. When we see the metaphor through this lens, we can more clearly understand the Matthew 6:22-23 meaning.

People focused on their material possessions may believe they are experiencing the best life has to offer. But a stingy way of living snuffs out the light of God’s own image within us. God created humans for loving, peaceful community, and we are designed to freely share with one another.

Two Approaches to Possessions

Based on the larger biblical context, we can see the connection between Jesus’ metaphor, “the eye is the lamp of the body,” and the Hebrew Bible idiom about the good eye versus bad eye. It’s all about generosity or stinginess. With this striking image, he warns people that a smidgen of stinginess can spoil the whole heart:

“If your eye is bad ... if the light that is in you is darkness, then how great is the darkness!” (Matthew 6:23, NASB).

Thankfully, the opposite is also true:

“If your eye is **clear** [or **single** (KJV/ ASV), **good** (NKJV), **healthy** (NET/ NLV), etc.], then your whole body will be full of light!” (Matthew 6:22, NASB).

Why does Jesus use this complex and layered picture? Why not directly teach: “Don’t be stingy; be generous”?

Perhaps it’s **because metaphors make us think**. They get behind our defenses and force us to wonder. Maybe Jesus is artfully saying that he wants his listeners to meditate more deeply within their own hearts, over long periods of time, in order to slowly but surely become people who do not merely follow his instruction but who genuinely *want* to follow.

When we ponder the picture of the eye-lamp and its connection to selfishness or generosity, we cannot help but wonder: Do I use others for personal gain, or do I live with generosity toward others, showing real love for them and tangible concern for their well-being? The self-serving approach corrupts and isolates us into darkness. But Jesus says that the loving-others approach builds everyone up and leads to a healthy, bright life.

Parable 2: Two Masters

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Jesus continues to emphasize how important generosity is with another parable.

Matthew 6:24 NASB “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” [money (NIV); mammon (NKJ); literally **“mamonas” (Aramaic)**]

The stakes are high here, and Jesus is pretty blunt. Our love for money and stuff can prevent us from experiencing the union of Heaven and Earth. According to Jesus, wealth can demand our loyalty, like a tyrant. We might think we own our stuff, but before long, it can end up owning us. We can shift our focus away from our stuff and stop storing up more than what we need. This will bring freedom and allow us to use the stuff we do have to bless others and foster the lasting rewards of the Kingdom of the skies.

Let's unpack a little further the meaning of Mammon.

[What Does Jesus Say About Money?](#) (Sermon on the Mount, Episode 28, July 8, 2024)

Mammon is a Semitic word that is found in both ancient Hebrew and Aramaic.

Here is what is interesting. Jesus puts mammon on the same level as God. We serve either God or mammon.

So, this has caused many people to wonder: Is mammon a proper name, like for a perceived god or deity? Like rival deities? Or, is Jesus just personifying it creatively?

There is a dictionary in which one keeps finding helpful insights. It is called, [The Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible](#). P.W. Vonderhorst wrote the article on mammon. What he notes is that this word mammon is most likely a noun for of the Semitic root “amen.” This word is in both Aramaic and Hebrew, which means to affirm something as trustworthy.

So, the noun “mammon” is most likely derived from “amen,” which you put what we call an “m” on the front. That is the way you often form nouns in Semitic languages—to put an “m” on the front of a word or put a “mem” on the front.

So, the meaning of mammon as a noun is “that in which you trust.” This word is a great description of money. Money can be the thing in which you trust. So, the author of the article says that in the teaching of Jesus, mammon is personified as come kind of superhuman power that stands in competition to God. And, by possessing people, it can even keep them from being devoted to God and make people hate God.

Further, you can make as strong case that this understanding is great way of summarizing the way the Hebrew Bible talks about wealth. It is a power that deceives humans into trusting in something that will lead them to death.

And, there are a lot of different words that Jesus could have used to describe money. Yet, Jesus chose to use the word “mammon” here.

The word “mammon” doesn't come from the Hebrew Bible. It comes from the literature and thought of Second Temple Judaism. This is where the word “mammon” got into circulation. And, this word “mammon” means “the thing you trust in.”

So, the category of idolatry or spiritual beings here is actually similar. The Bible prophets often make fun of the actual idol statues that people bow down to worship. "You are bowing down to something you made."

Paul says the same thing: "That statue in that temple is really nothing. But, there is a spiritual being who is behind that statue and who is deceiving people and leading them to destruction by using that physical object."

So, mammon can have a malevolent spiritual being behind it that seeks to deceive, control, and manipulate people. Such evil seeks to "kill, steal, and destroy."

[Possessions] "can become a focus of concern and greed which competes for the disciples' loyalty with God himself. The principle of materialism is in inevitable conflict with the kingship of God." (France, R. T. *The Gospel of Matthew*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publication Co., 2007.)

Point: You cannot serve God and Mammon (money).

Summary:

In Matthew 6:22-24, Jesus gives two parables. **The first parable deals with Two Eyes.** The good eye represents a person who imitates God's generosity. The bad eye symbolized a self-consumed person who neglects the needs of others. Jesus tells us that the good life is found not in greed for possessions but in neighborly love.

The second parable deals with Two Masters: God and Mammon. The word "mammon" refers to possessions, like money or property. Jesus describes it as a burdensome ruler which offers false promises of security and happiness. And, Jesus also believes that possessions (money or property) can be used to care for others and build relationships, which is true wealth. Mammon or money can become a focus of concern and greed that competes for our loyalty with God himself. The principle of materialism is in conflict with the kingship of God. Whom will you serve: God or Mammon?

Note: The practice of spiritual giving-- of bringing the tithe to the Lord and giving offerings over above the tithe-- such spiritual practices of tithing, generosity, and extravagance help to disempower materialism and foster trust in God.

Conclusion:

Our identity: We are a people who follow Jesus, who listen to the voice of God, and who get in action around what the Lord is saying through the power of his Holy Spirit.

For reflection:

1. What is God saying to you?
2. What is getting stirred up in you?
3. Where do you sense resistance?
4. What questions do you have?
5. What are you feeling or thinking?
6. What is at least one takeaway for you today?

Ministry Time.

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[Wealth and Worry](#)

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[Sermon on the Mount](#)

[Wealth and Worry](#)

Jesus of Nazareth is a 1st century Jewish man whose teaching and way of life began to reunite God's domain with our domain. He calls this reunion the arrival of the Kingdom of the skies. And Jesus invites people to follow him so that they can enter into that heavenly realm here on Earth in their day-to-day lives.

As humans, we desire divine experiences like love, peace, safety and security, but we face obstacles on the path to these rewards. In fact, Jesus says the biggest obstacle to experiencing God's heavenly life and presence is our stuff! Possessions and wealth may make us feel more stable and secure, but Jesus has a different perspective on material things.

In this guide, discover Jesus' teaching about wealth and possessions, including the worry they often produce in our lives. You can also explore related videos, podcast episodes, and more.

The Big Idea

Jesus urges followers to love God and others—not wealth. Possessions, like masters, command our attention and distract us. But by trusting our generous creator and focusing on what God values, we can become more free and content.

Context

Matthew places the Sermon on the Mount within his larger narrative about Jesus that takes place in Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, and the surrounding occupied lands of the Greco-Roman Empire between approximately 4 B.C.E. and 35 C.E. The book was likely composed sometime between 55 and 90 C.E.

Key Themes

- The human tendency to trust in wealth and possessions
- How generosity leads to life and greed leads to death
- The inability to live for God and wealth at the same time
- Worrying about money and resources
- Average life versus life in God's Kingdom

Structure

Matthew 6:19-34 belongs to the larger literary unit of Matthew 6:19-7:12, where Jesus teaches people about righteousness—a way of relating rightly with both God and neighbor. In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus focuses specifically on wealth and possessions. He opens with three statements about the difference between generosity and stinginess. In the second half of this section (vs. 25-34), Jesus gives two analogies that demonstrate God's endless, abundant generosity. The whole section closes with an exhortation to trust in God's provision and acknowledge the futility in worrying about having enough stuff.

Storing Up Stuff

Jesus starts this section of teaching by saying:

Matthew 6:19 NASB

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

We all know that stuff wears out, runs out, or gets lost. So we often work to gather even more and protect what we already own. In doing so, we place more and more

of our attention on our stuff. And before we know it, we're living for that stuff—it owns us. All of this hoarding of resources leads to more stress and fear. Jesus presents an alternative and says we can experience [the good life](#) when we direct our attention elsewhere. He says:

Matthew 6:20 NASB

²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal;

But what is this “sky stuff?” Sky stuff is the rich experience of peace and fulfillment we feel when we follow Jesus’ teaching about loving God and each other. This may look like a kind word, an act of generosity, offering forgiveness, or showing compassion. Jesus encourages us to store up that kind of stuff because the loving relationships we cultivate now will last into the new creation.

We receive and store up sky stuff when we trust God and live according to his instruction. Jesus describes this as inheriting [eternal life](#). We can experience the sky stuff right now, and it will be waiting for us in the renewed creation, making it more valuable and secure than anything we could store up on the land.

But why can't we store up both land stuff and sky stuff at the same time? Jesus warns us to be careful because our stuff has a way of slowly shaping us in its image and consuming our hearts. Or as Jesus puts it:

Matthew 6:21 NASB

²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In other words, we ought to focus our hopes and desires on what matters most. When we do this, we will become more free, generous, and *alive*.



The Lamp of the Body

In his next teaching, Jesus uses a vivid image to describe this kind of focus.

Matthew 6:22 NASB

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then, if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light.

This phrase, “good eye,” is a figure of speech in the Hebrew Bible for being generous, while a “bad eye” is a metaphor for being stingy, hoarding your stuff. Jesus warns that a bad eye is the quickest way to ruin yourself.

Matthew 6:23 NASB

²³ But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. So if the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

Does Jesus mean we should give all our stuff away? Well, Jesus does tell one wealthy man to do just that (see [Matthew 19:16-30](#)). But ultimately, this teaching is about our priorities and how we relate to others. When we love only ourselves, we see our stuff as something to hoard and protect. But when we love others, we can see our possessions and resources as blessings for everyone around us.



No One Is Able to Serve Two Masters

Jesus continues to emphasize how important generosity is with another parable.

Matthew 6:24 NASB

²⁴ “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.



The stakes are high here, and Jesus is pretty blunt. Our love for money and stuff can prevent us from experiencing the union of [Heaven and Earth](#). According to Jesus, wealth can demand our loyalty, like a tyrant. We might think we own our stuff, but before long, it can end up owning us. We can shift our focus away from our stuff and stop storing up more than what we need. This will bring freedom and allow us to use the stuff we do have to bless others and foster the lasting rewards of the Kingdom of the skies.

Consider the Birds and Flowers

At the end of the day, we all do need stuff to survive. We need food, clothing, and shelter. This section closes with another teaching about physical resources, bringing all of these ideas together.

Matthew 6:25 NASB

²⁵ “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is life not more than food, and the body more than clothing?”

What does Jesus mean here? The word Jesus uses for “worry” here is the Greek word “*merimnao*,” which means to have concern for something. Sometimes concern is good, like showing concern for a friend. But often, our tendency to be concerned can get out of hand—choosing to focus on *potential* problems or dwelling on disasters that *might* happen.

When we obsess over things beyond our control, like rain for our crops or what's going to happen tomorrow, we may experience a gnawing ache in our gut. And that ache won't help us live longer or bring us peace or security. Rather it steals the joy out of the present moment. Jesus wants to free us from that ache of worry by redirecting our attention to God's trustworthy character.



Matthew 6:26-28 NASB

²⁶ Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more important than they? ²⁷ And which of you by worrying can add a single day to his life's span? ²⁸ And why are you worried about clothing? Notice how the lilies of the field grow; they do not labor nor do they spin thread for cloth,

With these words, Jesus draws on biblical poems like [Psalm 104](#), which describe how God holds the universe in a delicate balance and lavishly cares for his creation.

Psalms 104:1-35 NASB

104 Bless the Lord, my soul!

Lord my God, You are very great;

You are clothed with splendor and majesty,

² Covering Yourself with light as with a cloak,

Stretching out heaven like a tent curtain.

³ He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters;

He makes the clouds His chariot;

He walks on the wings of the wind;

⁴ He makes the winds His messengers,

Flaming fire His ministers.

⁵ He established the earth upon its foundations,

So that it will not totter forever and ever.

⁶ You covered it with the deep sea as with a garment;
The waters were standing above the mountains.

⁷ They fled from Your rebuke,
At the sound of Your thunder they hurried away.

⁸ The mountains rose; the valleys sank down
To the place which You established for them.

⁹ You set a boundary so that they will not pass over,
So that they will not return to cover the earth.

¹⁰ He sends forth springs in the valleys;
They flow between the mountains;

¹¹ They give drink to every animal of the field;
The wild donkeys quench their thirst.

¹² The birds of the sky dwell beside them;
They lift up their voices from among the branches.

¹³ He waters the mountains from His upper chambers;
The earth is satisfied with the fruit of His works.

¹⁴ He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,
And vegetation for the labor of mankind,
So that they may produce food from the earth,

¹⁵ And wine, which makes a human heart cheerful,
So that he makes his face gleam with oil,
And food, which sustains a human heart.

¹⁶ The trees of the Lord drink their fill,
The cedars of Lebanon which He planted,

¹⁷ Where the birds build their nests,
And the stork, whose home is the juniper trees.

¹⁸ The high mountains are for the wild goats;
The cliffs are a refuge for the rock hyrax.

¹⁹ He made the moon for the seasons;
The sun knows the place of its setting.

²⁰ You appoint darkness and it becomes night,
In which all the animals of the forest prowl about.

²¹ The young lions roar for their prey
And seek their food from God.

²² When the sun rises they withdraw,
And they lie down in their dens.

²³ A person goes out to his work
And to his labor until evening.

²⁴ Lord, how many are Your works!
In wisdom You have made them all;
The earth is full of Your possessions.

²⁵ There is the sea, great and broad,
In which are swarms without number,
Animals both small and great.
²⁶ The ships move along there,
And Leviathan, which You have formed to have fun in it.
²⁷ They all wait for You
To give them their food in due season.
²⁸ You give to them, they gather it up;
You open Your hand, they are satisfied with good.
²⁹ You hide Your face, they are terrified;
You take away their breath, they perish
And return to their dust.
³⁰ You send forth Your Spirit, they are created;
And You renew the face of the ground.
³¹ May the glory of the Lord endure forever;
May the Lord rejoice in His works;
³² He looks at the earth, and it trembles;
He touches the mountains, and they smoke.
³³ I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.
³⁴ May my praise be pleasing to Him;
As for me, I shall rejoice in the Lord.
³⁵ May sinners be removed from the earth
And may the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, my soul.
Praise the Lord !

Jesus goes on:

Matthew 6:30 NASB

³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith!

As humans, we are made in [God's image](#) and filled with his breath—his [Spirit](#). Since God designed our world with plenty of life-giving resources for everyone, we don't need to worry about having enough. And we don't need to hoard or violently defend our resources. We can live generously and give without fear, and even become God's means of providing for others.

Dive deeper: To see how one's fearless, generous way of life can be rooted in God's promised presence, read our article on [the meaning of Isaiah 41:10](#).

To clarify, in this teaching, Jesus isn't talking about anxiety that you cannot control—that sense of dread or anxiety that results from trauma, a chemical imbalance, or

other mental health issues. It takes discernment to know the difference, and God often provides healing through the wisdom and expertise of others. But if we're wrestling with the choice to worry over scarce resources or potential problems, Jesus invites us to take a deep breath and trust that God's provision is more than enough for everyone. And there's a lot of evidence for this. Like Jesus says, watch the birds, gaze at the lilies, and see God's generous care for his whole [creation](#).

Matthew 6:31-34 NASB

³¹ Do not worry then, saying, 'What are we to eat?' or 'What are we to drink?' or 'What are we to wear for clothing?' ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you.

³⁴ "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

More Resources

Videos

- Passage Insight: Do Not Worry

[\(Watch\)](#)

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- Wealth and Worry

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- Vocab Insight: Mammon / Wealth

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- Vocab Insight: Basileia / Kingdom

[\(Watch\)](#)

[\(Download\)](#)

- Matthew 6:19-23: True Wealth and Generosity

[\(Watch\)](#)

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Book Recommendations From Our Scholarship Team

- Dietrich Boenhoffer, [*The Cost of Discipleship*](#)
- Leon Morris, [*The Gospel According to Matthew \(The Pillar New Testament Commentary\)*](#)
- Joel B. Green, Jeannine K. Brown, Nicholas Perrin, [*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels \(The IVP Bible Dictionary Series\)*](#)
- Michael J. Wilkins, [*The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*](#)
- Craig S. Keener, [*The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*](#)
- W.D. Davies, Dale C. Allison Jr., Christopher M. Tuckett, [*Matthew 1-7: Volume 1 \(International Critical Commentary\)*](#)
- R.A Torrey, [*The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*](#)
- Dallas Willard, [*The Divine Conspiracy*](#)
- Scot McKnight, [*Sermon on the Mount \(The Story of God Bible Commentary\)*](#)
- R. T. France, [*The Gospel of Matthew \(The New International Commentary on the New Testament\)*](#)

Resources From BibleProject

- Sermon on the Mount BibleProject Scholar Team Translation Video Script

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- [What Matthew 6:22-23 \(The Eye Is the Lamp of the Body\) Means](#)
- [What Matthew 6:33 \(Seek First the Kingdom of God\) Means](#)

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[What Matthew 6:22-23 \(The Eye Is the Lamp of the Body\) Means](#)

Exploring Jesus' Metaphor for Our Relationship to Wealth

by **BibleProject Scholar Team** – Aug 27, 2024

- Biblical Interpretation of the Eye and Its Quality
- How Eyes Relate to Light and Darkness in the Bible
- Isn't Wealth a Gift from God?
- Two Approaches to Possessions

On its own, it's hard to make sense of Jesus' eye-lamp metaphor. However, the ambiguity fades when our interpretation of "the eye is the lamp of the body" involves reading Jesus' words in context. He's using imagery from the Hebrew Bible to say that one's spiritual health can be assessed in part by observing the way one uses material possessions.

First, this single sentence belongs to a large body of teaching found in [Matthew 5-7](#), known as the [Sermon on the Mount](#). Jesus talks about the body's eye-lamp in a section of the sermon ¹ that focuses on the [dangers involved with wealth](#). This context helps us see that his metaphor specifically speaks to our relationship with money and possessions.

Second, as a Jewish teacher, Jesus appeals to common idioms in the [Hebrew Bible](#). Seeing how biblical authors use the metaphorical language of "light-filled" versus "dim" eyes—or "good" versus "bad" eyes—can help us gain a deeper understanding of Jesus' intended message. For Jesus, the eye becomes an image related to either generosity or stinginess. The sincere or good eye represents a generous person who imitates God's generosity to others, while the bad eye symbolizes a self-consumed person who takes instead of gives and neglects the needs of others.

Let's dig into the context of the Sermon on the Mount and the Hebrew Bible to add more clarity to Jesus' famous (yet perplexing) words:

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! ²

Biblical Interpretation of the Eye and Its Quality

“Good eye!” a friend says when you find the missing puzzle piece. “Good eyes!” an optometrist says when test results reveal your 20/20 vision. Having a good eye can mean many things, but Jesus uses the idea more specifically.

The “good eye” Jesus alludes to finds its root in the Hebrew Bible, where authors use it idiomatically to talk about generosity. The Hebrew phrase *tov ‘ayin* literally means “good eye,” but English translations often use the word “generous” to communicate its deeper meaning. Consider [Proverbs 22:9](#):

“One who is **generous** [*tov ‘ayin*] will be blessed, because he gives some of his food to the poor.” (NASB)

The opposite of *tov ‘ayin* (good eye) in Hebrew is *ra’ ayin* (bad eye). This example from [Proverbs 23:6-7](#) shows both the “bad” and “duplicitous” nuances conveyed in this idiom:

“Do not eat the bread of a **selfish** [*ra’ ayin* or “bad eye”] person or desire his delicacies. For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, ‘Eat and drink!’ But his heart is not with you.”

Notice how the proverb warns against wanting anything from this double-minded person. Even if what they give has material value, it’s tied to corruption and best to avoid altogether. The bad eye represents the way of pretending to care for others’ needs while staying self-obsessed—publicly posturing as generous when the true agenda is all about personal gain.

Jesus appeals to this “bad eye” idiom in [Matthew 6:23](#), using the Greek *poneros* (“bad”) to describe the eye. But it’s interesting that Matthew doesn’t use an equivalent Greek word like “good” to provide a contrast to the bad eye (see [Matthew 6:22-23](#)). Instead he uses the Greek word *haplous*, which can communicate ideas like healthy, single, sincere, and clear.

“... if therefore thine eye be single [*haplous*], thy whole body shall be full of light.” ³ (KJV)

Haplous often describes a person’s motivation, conveying the idea that people with single or sincere motivations are genuine in action—they have the good eye. The opposite of *haplous* is *dipulous*, which means “double.” People with double motives speak or act in one way while hiding their real agenda—they have the bad eye. So rather than using “good versus bad,” Jesus uses “sincere or single versus bad.”

Another helpful note for interpretation is that the noun related to *haplous*, which is *haplotes*, occurs often in the New Testament to convey ideas like simplicity, sincerity, and generosity:

"... if [your gift] is giving, then give [*haplotes*] generously." ⁴

"... their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich [*haplotes*] generosity." ⁵

"You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous [*haplotes*] on every occasion ..." ⁶

With these wordplays and idioms in mind, it looks like Jesus is using this eye-lamp metaphor to say that one's spiritual health can be assessed in part by observing the way one uses material possessions. Or as New Testament scholar R.T. France says, "This rather obscure little saying seems to be using a wordplay ... in order to commend both single-mindedness (in pursuing the values of the Kingdom of Heaven) and generosity ... as a key to the effective life of a disciple." ⁷

How Eyes Relate to Light and Darkness in the Bible

Jesus appears to develop his eye as a lamp metaphor from the Hebrew Bible, where the authors often describe eyes as either a source of light or a place where light resides. Having eyes full of light can refer to a person's liveliness, like a lamenting David who cries out to God for help in [Psalms 13:3](#):

"Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes [*ha'irah einai*], or I will sleep the sleep of death." ⁸

[Proverbs 15:30](#) gives an example of light-filled or bright eyes being a mark of happiness: "Bright eyes [*me'or einayim*] gladden the heart; good news refreshes the bones." ⁹

And at times, the authors describe spiritual beings with eye and lamp language.

In [Zechariah 4:10](#), an angel tells Zechariah that the seven golden lamps on the lampstand symbolize God's eyes:

"But these seven ... they are the eyes [*einei*] of the LORD roaming throughout the earth." ¹⁰

Conversely, other Hebrew Bible literature also describes the dim or dull eye, which often refers to a person's decline in health due to old age:

"Now it came about, when Isaac was old and his eyes [*einav*] were too dim to see ..." ¹¹

“Now the eyes [*ve'einei*] of Israel were so dim from age that he could not see.”¹²

Dimmed eyes can even symbolize a person's extreme suffering, like David's experience described in [Psalm 38:10](#):

“My heart throbs, my strength fails me; and the light of my eyes [*ve'or-einai*], even that has gone from me.”¹³

Jesus appeals to these various depictions of light and dark eyes to convey at least two main points in his teaching. First, he says that generous people remain full of light like a lamp—vibrant and even happy with love for their neighbors. Second, he connects the concept of unloving stinginess to dim or dark eyes, suggesting that the stingy person has dim or darkened eyes and will experience a continuous decline into lonesome isolation and painful darkness.

Isn't Wealth a Gift from God?

The bad-eyed, stingy way of life is full of darkness, Jesus says, and he uses his parable about the rich man and Lazarus as an illustration (see [Luke 16:19-31](#)). The rich man has a bad eye because he lives solely for himself and the comforts of his wealth, while neglecting to care for Lazarus' needs.

But wait. Isn't wealth a sign of God's favor?

Some listening to Jesus' story surely think that the rich man's luxurious possessions display clear evidence of God's favor and blessing. But in the biblical narrative, prosperity and wealth are often signs of brutal injustice toward the vulnerable. Way back,¹⁴ before the Assyrian exile, the shepherd-prophet Amos rebukes wealthy Israelites for thinking their prosperity is evidence of God's favor. Amos says their wealth actually proves their own stinginess, greed, and abuse of the poor. While their actions may be viewed as socially acceptable, they're in opposition to God.¹⁵

The exact same thing happens several centuries later, just before the Babylonian exile. Like Toto pulling the Wizard of Oz's curtain back to reveal his weakness, the prophet Ezekiel uncovers Israel's extreme vulnerability, one masked behind wealth and power.¹⁶

Ezekiel declares that Israel's wealth and power no longer have anything to do with God's blessing. Worse, Ezekiel explains that God's presence has long departed from the temple and from their midst.¹⁷ By normalizing oppression, Israel's wealth is actually blood money, not God's favorable blessing.¹⁸

In telling the Lazarus story, Jesus may or may not be suggesting that the rich man gained his wealth through oppression. But he's likely working with the same themes, inviting us to honestly evaluate our relationship to wealth and reasons for hanging onto it. In the end, things turn out poorly for the rich man due to his selfishness.

Throughout his teaching, Jesus tells us that true, wonderful experiences of life have almost nothing to do with owning stuff. Jesus lived in poverty and experienced the good life at its fullest because the good life God offers is found in love for one's neighbor. Wealth itself is neither light nor darkness, but *loving wealth* is darkness. And to love wealth instead of neighbor is to switch off the eye-lamp. When we see the metaphor through this lens, we can more clearly understand the [Matthew 6:22-23](#) meaning.

People focused on their material possessions may believe they are experiencing the best life has to offer. But a stingy way of living snuffs out the light of God's own image within us. God created humans for loving, peaceful community, and we are designed to freely share with one another.

Two Approaches to Possessions

Based on the larger biblical context, we can see the connection between Jesus' metaphor, "the eye is the lamp of the body," and the Hebrew Bible idiom about the good eye versus bad eye. It's all about generosity or stinginess. With this striking image, he warns people that a smidgen of stinginess can spoil the whole heart:

"If your eye is bad ... if the light that is in you is darkness, then how great is the darkness!" ¹⁹

Thankfully, the opposite is also true:

"If your eye is clear [or single ²⁰, good ²¹, healthy ²², etc.], then your whole body will be full of light!" ²³

Why does Jesus use this complex and layered picture? Why not directly teach: "Don't be stingy; be generous"?

Perhaps it's because metaphors make us think. They get behind our defenses and force us to wonder. Maybe Jesus is artfully saying that he wants his listeners to meditate more deeply within their own hearts, over long periods of time, in order to slowly but surely become people who do not merely follow his instruction but who genuinely *want* to follow.

When we ponder the picture of the eye-lamp and its connection to selfishness or generosity, we cannot help but wonder: Do I use others for personal gain, or do I live with generosity toward others, showing real love for them and tangible concern for their well-being? The self-serving approach corrupts and isolates us into darkness. But Jesus says that the loving-others approach builds everyone up and leads to a healthy, bright life.

1. Matthew 6:19-34
2. Matthew 6:22-23, NASB
3. Matthew 6:22, KJV
4. Romans 12:8, NIV
5. 2 Corinthians 8:2, NIV
6. 2 Corinthians 9:11, NIV
7. R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew, New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 262.
8. NASB
9. NASB
10. NASB
11. Genesis 27:1, NASB
12. Genesis 48:10, NASB
13. NASB
14. Likely during the first half of the 8th century B.C.E., around 760-755 B.C.E.
15. See Amos, esp. 2:6-8; 4:1-3; 5:10-27; 6:1-14.
16. See Ezekiel 13:1-23.
17. See Ezekiel 19
18. See Ezekiel 22:1-31 for one of several examples.
19. Matthew 6:23, NASB
20. King James Version; American Standard Version
21. New King James Version; Berean Standard Bible
22. New English Translation; New Living Translation

23. Matthew 6:22, NASB

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