



## Matthew 6:22–23

22 “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

### Reflection

Time and time again in Matthew’s gospel

and in the Sermon on the Mount we've been left with a picture of the black and white nature of the kingdom of God. We're either members of the kingdom of God or members of the kingdom of this world. And while we live in the overlap of the ages, the two just don't combine well. You can't live with one foot in each camp, you can't live with a foot in the church and a foot in the world. It leads to a conflicted and confused life which may appear on the surface to be a life that enjoys the best of both worlds but is actually flirting with disaster, because, as Jesus warned us yesterday, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Today's passage continues this theme although it initially comes across as confusing to the modern reader. What does

it mean when Jesus says that ‘the eye is the lamp of the body?’ And how does a lamp that we would normally associate with shining outwardly, actually shine inwardly to fill our body with light; or even more confusingly shine inwardly and fill us with darkness? And if that isn’t confusing enough, Jesus then mixes his metaphors by telling us that this eye-lamp can be either healthy or unhealthy, only to end our passage with mind bending image of bodies being filled with ‘dark light.’

This might confuse us, but to the ancient hearer this imagery would have been as clear as it was powerful. Here’s what we’re missing. In ancient thought it was generally supposed that the human eye was quite literally a source of light. Sight was understood to function by means of

a flow of light from the eyes out to the object in view. The light from the eyes was thought to merge with the light coming from the object which was illuminated by the sun. The light then flowed or bounced back to the eye and penetrated through the eye into the person, where sight was registered. As the lamp is an image for the eye, so the eye in turn is an image for the human capacity to absorb from what is available externally.

So Jesus is saying 'what you look at, what you fill your eyes with, floods your heart.' If you fix your eyes on the things of this world instead of Jesus and his coming kingdom, then, like yesterday, where your eyes are, fixating on all these worldly treasures, there your heart will be also. If you're forever drinking in material pas-

sions and pursuits with your eyes, they're going to drown your heart.

Jesus is teaching us not to get caught up fantasizing over the material things that Gentiles back then and non-Christians today are forever running after. These things perish, spoil and fade. They're eaten up by moths and rats and rust. They don't last, they're not eternal, but far more than just being a waste of time they can actually be a trap and a snare laid out by the devil. They'll make you ineffective in your faith or even worse stop you from coming to genuine faith in the first place.

Jesus is reminding us that the eye is as dangerous as the heart, and in fact, it is usually through the eye that the heart is most strongly influenced. We saw this when Je-

Jesus taught us about adultery. So Jesus is saying be very careful when it comes to what you look at and the way you look at it. Be very careful of the motion picture of our culture that is always running past our eyes; be very careful of the affluence that is everywhere present, and everywhere celebrated, and everywhere longed for within our culture.

Instead, fix your eyes on Jesus, set your hearts and mind on things above, on things eternal. To put it bluntly and contextualise it for today, if you're absorbed with money you'll miss everything else that really matters. You'll not only waste your life but it may end up costing you your life. Rather, see clearly and see this world as God sees it. Take an eternal perspective on life. As the motion picture of our culture runs past

your eyes apply a kingdom filter. What will last? That is the question the wise person asks as she evaluates the smorgasbord of life. Fill your eyes and your minds and your hearts with God's plans and purposes for the kingdom of God. In doing so you'll find great contentment in this life and store up real treasure that will last on into the next.

## **Think**

It's likely that you're reading this before you head out into your day. As you think through the day ahead why not apply a kingdom filter? What will last? For many of us the answers may be surprising. Not what we do at work, but how we do it. Not what we achieve at work, but those few words we have each day when we duck out with a colleague for coffee. In fact all

the encounters we'll have with people today have the potential to last into eternity. And the money we're about to earn, well that could go either way, depending on how we spend it. Bibles in Africa, sex trafficking awareness and prevention, Christian aid work in Afghanistan; or a new car lease every three years. How can you bring this eternal perspective, this eternal foresight into your plans for today? Or from another angle, what is likely to pass in front of your vision today that may place you at risk of wasting your life? Of clouding your judgement? Pulling up next to your boss's new car in the car park, and then noticing every similar car on the road as you drive home? The endless stream of property shows on television and glossy property lift outs in the newspapers preparing you to borrow more than you can afford and



work harder than you should for the next 25 years? How can you lift your eyes to things above with so many things pulling you down below?

## **Pray**

The answer to that last question is in part through prayer. Why not pray the Lord's Prayer now? You'll find it is a wonderful antidote to everything we've just been discussing. It's all about the kingdom of God and offers us a very helpful petition when it comes to the lust of our eyes towards material things. Jesus would have us pray, every day, simple words to this effect 'Give us today our daily bread.' – no more, no less, just what I need my King, just what I need. It reminds me of a prayer from the book of Proverbs. I'll end with

that, perhaps you might pray it as well:

“Two things I ask of you, Lord;  
do not refuse me before I die:  
Keep falsehood and lies far from  
me;  
give me neither poverty nor riches,  
but give me only my daily bread.  
Otherwise, I may have too much  
and disown you  
and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’  
Or I may become poor and steal,  
and so dishonor the name of my  
God. *Prov 30:7-9*