

 **Main Street**
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



Matthew 6:19-24
“Investment Strategies”

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(5th Sunday of Easter)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill
Main Street UMC
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646
Church Office: 864-229-7551
Church Website: www.msumc1.org

“Following Christ From City Center!”

**IIID'1: MATTHEW 6:19-24
"INVESTMENT STRATEGIES"**

Further Comment On First Discipline: Alms/Mercy = 6:1-4
Issue = Getting Straight On Possessions, Catalyst For Character

D'1) 6:19-24 GENERAL PRINCIPLE: NOT TEMPORAL BUT ETERNAL TREASURE. Real?

Desire to acquire! **DECISIONS ABOUT MONEY: HORDE/SHARE**

Self **a) vv.19-21 TWO TREASURES: A Choice About Money: Earth Or Heaven // Lk. 12:33-34 (Q).**
Prohibition + 3 Units// v.34, Antithetical Form -/+/Reason

19 -1 "Do not (as a habit) lay up for yourselves **treasures** on earth, //v.25,(-) Command, Continuous Present, //Alms 6:2-4
Share With Needy, Tobit 4:8-9, Sir. 29:10-12, *t. Peah* 4.18d* (lower/heavenly world)

2 where moth and rust ("eaters", "vermin") corrupt, Reasons: Natural Loss Of Corruption: Cloth, Metal
and where thieves break in and steal, Perishable/Vulnerable, Human Loss
In Heaven = With God In Heaven (God's Realm)

20 +1' but lay up (habitually) for yourselves treasures in heaven, (+) Command = Generosity To Others v. Greed/Hoarding
/Mt. 19:21, Lk. 12:21, Heb. 11:26

2' whether neither moth nor rust consumes Reasons: Permanent, Beyond Loss
and where thieves do not break in (dig through) and steal. Tobit 4:7-9, Sirach 29:10-12, Almsgiving
Almsgiving In Secret, Known Only By God

21 For where your treasure is, //6:2-4, 2 Bar. 24:1, Treasure = What You Value, Worry Over, Plan For, Hate To Lose
Heart there will your **heart** be also. Epictetus, *Diss.* 2.21.1, Control Center: Heart Follows Treasure

**What Lasts? We Love What We Invest In? Are You Invested In God's Kingdom?
Goal = Choose Properly Between Two Treasures, Tithing As A Reminder Of Priorities
Simplify, Disentangle**

b) vv.22-23 TWO EYES: How We See, Our Paradigm // Lk. 11:34-36 (Q). See?

DECISIONS ABOUT WORLD VIEW: ABUNDANCE/SCARCITY

22 1 "The eye is the lamp of the body. Assertion, Eye Reflects Selfish Spirit Within
Eye = Metaphor For Disposition To Others, Dt. 15:9, Tobit 4:7, Sir. 14:9-10

Eye -2 So, if your eye is sound (undivided, healthy), Ancient Judaism: Single Eye = Generous, T. Ben. 4.2
your whole body will be full of light; How Do You See the World? Generous Lenses
Assertion + Inferences, Scarcity Mentality? Abundance

23 +2' but if your eye is not sound (lit. evil, *poneros*, greedy), Cataract = Eye Clouded By Greed = Blind
your whole body will be full of darkness. Evil Eye = Stingy Spirit, 20:15

1' If then the light in you is darkness, What Is Your Guiding Light? Dt. 15:9 (LXX), Sir. 14:8, Mt. 20:15
how great is that darkness! Cognitive Capacities, If Your Light Is Darkness! Greed's Outcome
Worldview Issue = How Do You See The World? T. Jud. 18:2-3, 6

**Abundance Or Scarcity? Generosity Or Hoarding? Wrong Purpose = Wrong Life
Character Is Shaped By Intent, Our Sight Must Be Focused On God Who Is Light And Generosity
Three Images, One Idea, Scattered In Luke (Q)**

a') v.24 TWO MASTERS: God Or Mammon // Lk. 16:13 (Q). //Second Discipline: Prayer, Serve?

DECISIONS ABOUT LOYALTY: TRUST GOD? STUFF?

24a 1 "No one can serve (be a slave to) two masters; Two Masters Ex. 20:3, Master Is Exclusive Term, Rom. 6:16
b Philo *Frag.* 2.649

c 2 for either he will **hate** the one Hate Assertion + Reason + Application
Semitic: love A, hate B = prefer A over B, Jer. 8:2

d 3 and **love** the other, Love To Labor, To Be Attached
Assertion + Reason/For + Application: You

e 3' or he will be **devoted** to the one Devoted

f 2' and **despise** the other. Despise Diagnostic Question = In What Do I Trust?

Hand 1' You cannot serve God and **mammon** (property). God/Mammon Materialism = Life As Stuff
g Mammon = Wealth Personified As False God

**The God And Another God - Mammon- Have Different Goals For Us
5:39-42, 19:16-30, You Cannot Live A Divided Life, Loyalties Will Be Revealed**

**Goal = Single-minded Service Of This God, Disciples Are Non-Greedy, Compassionate, Suspicious Of World's Loyalties
These Three Units Say Basically The Same Thing: Generosity Serves God, Not Money As A Disciple, Sees God's Will
Seeing The Divine Will And Reality Changes Sight And Character**

We Are To Turn Our Backs On The Gods/Goods Of This World! = Cultural Atheists!

JESUS PRESENTS FORCED CHOICES!

Earth or Heaven? Darkness or Light? Mammon or God?

A Brief Treatment Of Matthew 6:19-34

In the fifth section of the Sermon on the Mount (D' 6:19-34) we move past the center into material on our ethical relations to others, the question being, "If we practice the secret disciplines of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer as Jesus instructed (E. 6:1-18), what kind of people do we become by the grace God gives?" Answer: we become generous and peaceful since God is our source. This new section falls into two parts (1. vv.19-24, 2. vv.25-34) as marked by initial imperatives (v.19, "Do not be anxious," // v.25, "Do not worry") with each part having three subunits (vv. 19-21, 22-23, 24 on money and vv.25-30, 31-33, 34 on anxiety). With its parallel section (D. 5:21-48) it shares two sections of three subunits and much common vocabulary: *men* (5:21//6:30), *heart* (5:28//6:21), *eye* (5:29, 38//6:22, 23), *body* (5:29//6:22, 23, 25), *heaven* (5:34//6:20), *God* (5:34//6:24), *love* (5:43, 44//6:24), *hate* (5:43//6:24), *Gentiles* (5:47//6:34).

The three subunits of 6:19-24 have parallel material scattered in Luke: vv.19-21 // Lk. 12:33-34, vv.22-23 // Lk. 11:34-36, v.24 // Lk. 16:13. Matthew has organized the three into a single literary unit. The inclusions in a//a' are synonyms: *treasures* (vv.19-21) // *mammon* (v.24g), *heart* (v.21) // *love, devoted* (v.24). A binary pattern (i.e. two treasures, two eyes, two masters) unites the three. The two outer sections (a//a') deal with the place of investment (vv.19-21) and ultimate present loyalties (v.24), the central unit (b) with how one sees based on light or darkness within (vv.22-23). How I see determines how I view God and the world; people act according to what they believe is true. Disciples see this world giving way to the next (kingdom of God) and order their priorities accordingly (vv.19-21); disciples have light within and spread it (vv.22-23); disciples have loyalty to God as a central organizing love (v.24). A this-world-only orientation tends to a scarcity mentality, to greed and stinginess, to the idolatry of possessions. It is not to be so among the community of Jesus' followers. We see and act differently as salt and light.

The first subunit (a. vv.19-21) has two parts: 1) a negative and positive command with warrants (vv.19-20), 2) a reason beginning with *For* (v.21). The command not to make accumulation the goal of life, "Do not— as a habit— lay up for yourselves treasures on earth," makes sense. In the world as it is, natural processes corrupt and theft is common. But if we *lay up habitually treasures in heaven*, these forces are not present; Jesus is calling for secure investment. The common Jewish understanding was that hoarding is bad for God's people and generosity a sign one knows God. Those who look to the next world live lightly and generously in this one. What we invest in captures our deep self, "For where your treasure is, there will *your heart* be also," and you want your passions directed to God, not to more stuff.

The second subunit (b. vv.22-23) has a concentric surface structure (1-2//2'-1') with a contrast of *sound eye* and *unsound eye* at the center. The assertion, "The eye is the lamp of the body," presumes one of the ancient views of vision that light is inside and passes out to the world through the eye. It is scientifically wrong but morally correct; we see the world as we are. If the light of Christ is within, we see the world as abundant and practice generosity. To be full of darkness is to live in perpetual night. The third subunit (a' v.24) has a 6:2 concentric structure (1-2-3 // 3'-2'-1') with the layers reflecting each other. At the center the pair *love//devoted*; in the next layer *hate//despise*; in the outer frames *two masters // God and mammon*. In that day there were slaves who served two masters, but when God is the master divided loyalty is not possible; God requires exclusive first commandment loyalty. The extreme polarities of *love/hate* are Semitic hyperbole for preference and loyalty. The neutral term *mammon* (property) is here personalized by Jesus as a false god who actively recruits followers. Don't believe him! It's a dead end.

INVESTMENT STRATEGIES

“No man can serve two masters.”

Ultimate loyalties are inevitable; life is a decision tree.

M A T T H E W 6 : 2 4

To be a preacher is to be a story-teller. Pastor Ed Young of Houston once had a revelation at a high school football game:

“During the third quarter, my daughter Landra said, ‘Dad, can I have some money to buy some candy?’

Now I'm not a big candy guy, but I said, ‘Landra, here's \$5. Go and buy some candy.’

She came back with a sack full of Skittles. As I watched her eat them, I said, ‘Landra, can I have some Skittles?’

She said, ‘No.’

I said, ‘Landra, just give me a couple.’

She said, ‘They're mine.’”

He continues:

“My little daughter didn't understand I was the one who bought the Skittles. I'm strong enough to take the Skittles and eat every one. I could go to the concession stand, put 300 packages on a credit card and give her so many Skittles she couldn't eat them in a year.”

Then, as preachers do, Young bridges the gap from *The Skittle Queen* to us:

“We all have Skittles,” he says. “Some have a pretty nice size pile of Skittles; others have a medium-size pile; some have little bags of Skittles. Our loving God says, ‘Would you bring me some Skittles? Just a few Skittles?’ What do you think our reaction is? ‘No! They're mine!’ God says, ‘Just bring me some Skittles.’ But we still say,

‘Uh-uh. I made those Skittles. I own those Skittles.’ Like my daughter, we don't understand several things. God is the one who gave them. They're his Skittles. In an instant, God could take all our Skittles. God could rain so many Skittles on our lives, we wouldn't know what to do with them. We couldn't possibly spend or enjoy all of them.’¹

For *the Jesus follower*– the new name for *Christian* since our old brand has grown a bit weak and thin over the years– life is lived under the constant gaze and within the encompassing reality of the Triune God: the Father above, the Son beside, the Holy Spirit within. Generosity is always in style in the new reality; we live with open arms and open hearts under an open heavens with a God whose heart is laid wide open to the world in Jesus Christ. What flows to us flows through us. Over time we learn to trust God for the need that’s in front of us, whatever it is in the moment: love, listening, help, encouragement, prayer, correction, teaching, healing, deliverance. Responding to the constant invitations of the invisible kingdom as it intersects our lives changes who we are. We give God permission to interrupt us, to disturb us, to lead us, to break our hearts and blow our minds. In ways big and small we’re offered a share in the life and work of the risen Jesus who knew how to live under an open heaven and is willing to teach us the same. Take a tour and follow him around in the gospels; where Jesus goes the unexpected happens. Over him the heavens ripped open at his baptism and did not close for three years till the moment he cried from the cross, “Why have you forsaken me?” Yet even here the Father was present, but the rescue was not yet. It only came on the third day, only after he drank the cup to the dregs in the full measure of devotion, only then did the reversal of resurrection validate the whole of his life as the story of God at ground level, which is why the simplest statement of this faith is that *God is like Jesus*.

John Wesley, the catalytic founder of our Methodist wing of the Jesus movement, was born in 1703, died in 1791, and knew plenty about economic uncertainty. In his day, Britain experienced rapid urbanization and the beginnings of industrialization. Rural economies began to collapse and problems flooded city centers: overcrowding, disease, crime, unemployment, debt, substance abuse, and even insanity (London established its first asylum in 1781). Meanwhile a small upper class spent large sums to distance itself– literally and figuratively– from the growing problems. The top five percent controlled nearly a third of national income.

¹ Edited, PreachingToday.com search under Matthew 6:19-24.

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Wesley... consorted mostly with people who worked hard, owned little, and could never be certain of their financial future. But he preached widely and became so well known his income eventually reached 1,400 pounds per year, equivalent to more than \$160,000 today. John Wesley was rich and famous. Still, he chose to live simply but comfortably on just 30 pounds while giving the rest away as he pursued his mission of offering Christ, forming small groups, working for the renewal of his national church, and spreading Scriptural holiness across the land. He donated nearly all the 30,000 pounds earned in his lifetime. He once wrote in deliberate hyperbole, "If I leave behind me ten pounds, you and all mankind [can] bear witness against me, that I have lived and died a thief and a robber."² The early Methodists lived lean and talked straight. Wesley also died a widower without children, so there was no pressure for their provision or a financial legacy. Still, his example is a powerful testimony of obedience to Jesus Christ, and his influence continues to this day and is now undergoing something of a renaissance as we ask, How can we be as effective in our day as he was in his?³ John Wesley had *treasure in heaven*.⁴

So we have Jesus and his teaching as vindicated in his resurrection; we have the nagging presence of the Holy Spirit, and we have examples in saints past and present. All to raise a question: What if his teaching is true? What if Jesus knew what he was talking about? What if he was not only the best who ever lived but the smartest?⁵ What if he is God the Son come down to ground level to display the riches of the new reality and give a preview of coming attractions? What if it's possible to live in a radical partnership with God? What if greed and the nagging lust for more is a deadly sin and foretaste of a hell where yearning is forever and forever unsatisfied? What if generosity, especially to those who in no way deserve it, is the light of God refracted through the lens of a human soul? What if stinginess and greed

² Elisha Coffman, editor, *Christian History Newsletter*, November 30, 2001.

³ On early Methodist small group discipline and practical theology, see Laura Bartels Felleman, *The Form and Power of Religion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

⁴ On John Wesley's teaching on the right use of money, see Thomas Oden, *John Wesley's Teaching, Vol. IV: Ethics and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), Chapter 2, "Basic Evangelical Economic Ethics," 59-10.

⁵ On the possibility of religious knowledge and that Jesus is to be respected for his expertise and smarts, see Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2009).

are cataracts which cloud true vision? What if treasure in heaven— meaning a valuable partnership with God— is not just then and there but here and now? What if there’s another way to live, and what if it’s available to all who follow Jesus?

TURNING TO THE TEXT

a) vv.19-21 Choices About Two Treasures.

In her book *9 Steps to Financial Freedom*, Suze Orman writes of a visit to Mexico. A merchant was selling parrots; they weren't in cages and didn't fly away. Orman was fascinated, "Do these birds love you so much they have no desire to fly away?"

"No," he said, "I train them to think their perches mean safety and security. When they think this, they wrap their claws tightly around the perch and don't want to release it. They keep themselves confined, as if they've forgotten how to fly."

"Was this hard to do? she asked.

"With little birds it's very hard; it's easy with the large birds."

Orman writes, "Suddenly a lightbulb went off.... We're just like those parrots. We've been taught to clutch our money as tightly as we can, as if our money is our perch of... security. We've all forgotten how free we really are— with or without the perch. The more afraid, the tighter we hold on, and the more we trap ourselves." She then asked the parrot man how he would go about *unteaching* this behavior.

"Easy," he said, "You show them how to release their grip; then they can fly as free as they want."⁶

Most of Jesus’ teaching challenges conventional wisdom, the sort of common sense everyone accepts, which means to be his follower requires a great deal of *un-teaching* and *un-learning*, what the Bible terms *repentance*, which is a change of mind leading to a change of behavior. God gives fresh light; we now see differently, and so can think and live a new way, but only if we turn to and go with the new reality we’ve glimpsed, what Jesus called *the kingdom of God*, and in other places *the kingdom of the heavens*, which was a polite Jewish way of not calling God’s name quite so directly around certain sensitive audiences. Life as a companion and understudy of Jesus is most often upside-down and inside-out from the way the now world operates under current management. Our world of sin and ignorance and death under the influence of the Evil One collides with the kingdom of God which is a free and forgiven life in the company of Jesus. We swim against the tide of the pressures

⁶ Edited, (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2000), 262.

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of our world, and when we— as some say— *go with the flow*, we lose our identity. Too often our first impulse is to domesticate Jesus’ teaching and take away the edge, to make him safe and practical and not such a disturbing presence. After all, how crazy it sounds to be invited to make deposits in an invisible bank?

“Do not make a habit of laying up and piling up for yourself treasures on earth, where moths eat holes in fabrics and mold rots the grain, where thieves dig through mud walls and steal. Instead, lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where none of that happens. Make a secure investment! Adopt a kingdom of God investment policy! Become a friend and secret agent of my Father.”

In the company of Jesus we learn the joy of kingdom generosity and the truth of his teaching. Not that we don’t work or own or manage wisely or invest or even enjoy, only that we don’t trust stuff for security, and everything we own is available should it be requisitioned. We hold possessions loosely and refuse to let their presence or absence define who we are. God is our source, and what God does not supply through our work or his surprising gifts, we don’t need. Are you there yet?

Tithing, which is ten percent of what you have to spend given to God through the church, is not the goal of giving but the beginning. And when that is established, and for some it takes a while to disentangle from debt and credit cards and emotion-driven spending and fear, an interesting dynamic begins. You care about the church and its work in ways you never did before. It becomes dear to you; you look for ways to enter in and find a place of service. From time to time you are moved to give extra because it feels like an investment in something valuable beyond yourself. And then a change happens. At some point you shift from an *ownership mind set* to a *stewardship mentality*; then all God has to do is squeeze you gently for gifts of time and prayer and service and money to flow freely, like honey from a full honeycomb. Such people are conduits through which God pours all sorts of resources. Calvin Miller wrote, “The world is poor because her fortune is buried in the sky and all her treasure maps are of the earth.”⁷ There are no shortages in the kingdom of God; what God asks of you, God finds a way to pay for, and God’s creativity is unlimited.

Jesus understood motivation; why should that surprise us since he knew his own heart and also everyone else’s? We see behavior; he saw the depths and in verse

⁷ PreachingToday.com search under Mt. 6:19-24.

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21 gives a summary of his findings, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” People care about where they’re invested: their children more than others, their team, their friends, their hobbies. We invest, and our heart follows. You learn to love whatever you give money, time and effort to. Affection follows attention.

Notice that Jesus did not say *For where you heart is, there will your treasure be also* because it’s not the same idea. Just the reverse. It’s not so much that dollars follow heart as heart follows dollars, and dollars are nothing but congealed sweat turned into marketable paper. Make a risky decision as an experiment of faith. Change your use of time and your financial commitments in the direction of the kingdom of God as best you understand it. Then observe new and supportive affections bubbling up from within. Jesus did not say *feel-it-and-then-do-it* but *do-it-and-then-feel-it*. In the hierarchy of human capacities, the will is the executive function, the emotions a supportive function.

The modern idea that I must feel something before I act in order to be genuine and true to myself is not integrity; it’s modern psycho-babble. The old hymn got it right, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way- to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”⁸ Sequence matters: first the risk of trust, then obey, then happiness in Jesus. Feelings are the fruit, not the starting point. Get it backwards, and you’ll always be frustrated. If you wait for emotions to propel you to right actions, you will remain an immature Christian because that is what children are: captive to their feelings and impulses. Maturity is when commitments are greater than moods. Maturity is when I trust and obey even when I don’t feel like it.

Come to think of it, you are far more likely to act your way into a new way of feeling than feel your way into a new way of acting. Your heart will follow the lead. Jesus said so, and he knows how we work and work best. Put your time and money in the kingdom of Jesus as best you understand it, then watch as your feelings adjust and find new delights. Over time, you and the Lord develop a deep partnership and a track record with one another. No scheming. No anxiety. Can you imagine the freedom? I occasionally get whiffs of it, and it’s intoxicating. It’s called *treasure in heaven*. Not long before he was martyred in the jungles of Equador, Jim Elliot wrote, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." I know something about you. I know where your heart is; it’s in the same place your treasure is. Your banker and broker know more about your faith than I do.

⁸ *The UM Hymnal*, No. 467.

b) vv.22-23 Choices About 2 Eyes.

When George Lucas, creator of the *Star Wars* saga, was asked how the young Anakin Skywalker became the Darth Vader, he said:

“He turns into Darth Vader because he gets attached to things. He can't let go of his mother; he can't let go of his girlfriend...It makes you greedy. And when you're greedy, you're on the path to the dark side, because you fear you're going to lose things, that you're not going to have the power you need.”⁹

What is it about the eyes? If you say they are the windows into the soul, you've said somethin Jesus agreed with. A drunk is bleary-eyed. Lovers are dreamy-eyed. The crafty person has an eye for a deal. Someone who is cock-eyed has a distorted view of reality, while an excited person is said to be bug-eyed.¹⁰ When Crystal Gayle sang *Don't it make my brown eyes blue?* it wasn't about eye color.

In Jesus' day there was a pair of proverbs about the eye, and beyond the eye the disposition of a person. One with *a single or healthy eye* was generous to the poor; a person with an *evil eye* was stingy with the needy. The way a person looks at you, their non-verbal language, and particularly the eyes, tells much about them, particularly whether they are approachable or not, and the poor see it instantly.

The modern knowledge of optics is that light comes from outside and strikes the retina where the process of sight begins. But that is not how many in Jesus' day understood vision; for them the eye was not *a light receiver* but *a light emitter*.¹¹ As a man of his age, this is what Jesus thought as well and stated in a highly compressed comparison, “The eye is the lamp of the body.” The analogy is that an oil lamp and window are to village house as God's Spirit and the human eye are to the person. When at night you looked at a village home in Nazareth, you see from the flicker

⁹ *Time*, April 29, 2002.

¹⁰ David Dockery & David Garland, *Seeking the Kingdom* (Wheaton, ILL: Shaw, 1992), 90.

¹¹ On the options and sources, see Dale Allison, *The Sermon On The Mount* (New York, NY: Herder & Herder, 1999), 142-145; Charles Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount* (Columbia, SC: USC Press, 2004), 123. For a diagram, see the appendix

through the window whether a lamp is lit within or not. No lamp lit, no light within, only darkness. Same with the interior of a person; the lights are either on, or they are not on. It shows in how they treat others, and you can see the light in their eyes, or the lack thereof. God’s love is a candle in the soul through the windows of the eyes, and if no light, then it is dark within. No friendly light of welcome.

What you see in life and believe about it are a reflection of who you are within, what we call your *world view*, what others call *lifestyle*.¹² And so while some in the ancient world were technically wrong about the physics of optics, they were philosophically and religiously correct about the nature of the person. We see the world not as it is but as we are. A generous person shines out light from within like a candle through the eyes; a stingy person lives in the same space with the same resources and yet shines out nothing but darkness. Greed and fear blind spiritual sight; they are cataracts on the light sensors of the soul. But if God is a generous supplier, and if I see that people are in God’s image and of supreme value, then an open ear and an open heart and an open hand are the only proper response. God’s love for me and through me to others is perfect sanity because it aligns me with the deepest grain of the universe, or— as Paul says- *love never ends*.¹³ If I see people as a bother, it says little about them and much about me. It’s not our eyes that determine sight and insight but our character. Those who know the God of Jesus see the world differently, not because they’re naive but because they’ve accepted Jesus’ invitation to prove the presence and resources of the parallel kingdom. When people come to initial faith in Jesus, a long dormant light is re-lit within. And the brighter the light of Christ grows within, the more we see clearly and so can behave differently. “So,” said Dr. Jesus in a clinical observation, “If your eye is sound or whole, your whole body will be *full of light*.” To be filled with the light and love of God! Is that possible? Jesus said so and invites to follow him and prove it so. Light and sight go together. This is why saints are our best teachers. To see the world through the eyes of Jesus is the ultimate education; to see through his eyes is to become a radical in every sense. Isn’t this why we sing?

“Open my eyes, that I may see, glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key, that shall unclasp and set me free.

¹² The definitive study is David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History Of A Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).

¹³ 1 Cor. 13:8a.

Silently now I wait for thee, ready my God thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine.”¹⁴

One glimpse of what he sees, and we’re marked. So what we naturally feel for the blind– which is compassion– we should feel for the stingy and greedy and fearful: they do not see the God of the kingdom or the grand opportunity before them. To behave differently they must first see differently, and only Christ has power to open inward eyes. Of such people Jesus said sadly, “If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness.” The world is full of Darth Vaders. Remember Lucas’ words, “And when you're greedy, you're on the path to the dark side, because you fear you're going to lose things, that you're not going to have the power you need.”

Have you asked Dr. Jesus for an eye exam? Have you asked him to light a candle in your heart? Do you see the poor, or are they invisible? Are your eyes kind and generous? Is your heart and hand open? If you do not have any face-to-face relationships with the chronically poor and the chronically ill and the ever-needy and the never-get-betters, if they never cross your path and make demands because you’ve successfully insulated yourself behind tinted windows and locked doors and friends like yourself, then you’re in a dangerous spiritual condition and slipping farther are farther from the kingdom of God. You are in danger of the *evil eye*, of growing spiritual darkness, which when complete is invisible, but only to you.

a’) v.24 Choices About 2 Masters.

The Maninka tribe in West Africa have a proverb about dual loyalties. They smile and say, "The man who tries to walk two roads will split his pants."¹⁵

The New Testament does not argue for or against slavery; rather, it assumes it as a social institution in a fallen world that will vanish with the coming of the kingdom of God and which we get to creatively undermine along the way. In the early church all were family, even if outside the circle roles were not drastically changed. Over time the larger culture was undermined by the church’s witness and

¹⁴ *U.M. Hymnal*: 454.

¹⁵ PreachingToday.com search under Mt. 6:19-24.

influenced to reject the institution of human ownership.¹⁶ Our own U.S. history—including the Civil War— shows how long it takes to root out such structures of sin and domination, and in our day new forms of slavery are always being invented. Today we call it human trafficking for labor and vice.

It was the teaching method of Jesus to take common proverbs and expand them with fresh content. Because the proverb was accepted folk wisdom, it was a ready bridge to kingdom realities. So far we've dealt with two such proverbs: v.21 on motivation, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also," and the first part of v.22 on character, "The eye is the lamp of the body." Now a third, which comes from the experience of slaves, verse 24: "No one can serve two masters." Loyalty is a number not divisible by two. Torment is defined by Jesus as seeking to please two bosses with different agendas; despite the best intentions to keep both happy, you'll always prefer one to the other and work harder for them.¹⁷ Jesus' use of the contrasts of *love and hate, devoted and despise* is a vivid way of speaking about forced choices and inevitable consequences.¹⁸

Now in stating the *two masters* proverb and exploring the dynamics of preference Jesus said nothing but what was already known; he brought the obvious to light. But he saves the punch line to the end when he names the two powers that compete for our loyalty, "You cannot serve God and Mammon." Mammon was a neutral word for *stuff* or property.¹⁹ Mammon was not a bad word but a useful one. But if it's capitalized— as I think it should be— and if it's paired with *God* as an alternative, then Jesus is saying that our attitudes towards possessions is not a matter of indifference. An alternative spiritual power is begging for loyalty and strutting itself around as an alternative to God. What was true in the world of slavery was an insight into the way things are behind the scenes for everyone, and it left Jesus' hearers with a question: Who is your God? To what are you giving loyalty? What

¹⁶ For the history, see Vincent Carroll & David Shiflett, *Christianity On Trial: Arguments Against Anti-Religious Bigotry* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2002), Chapter 2, "Christianity and Slavery," 24-53.

¹⁷ Robert Guelich, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 332-334.

¹⁸ Charles Talbert, *Reading the Sermon on the Mount* (Columbia, SC: USC Press, 2004), 123.

¹⁹ Idem.

has your heart? Do you dream about more of God or of more and better and newer, cooler stuff?

CONCLUSION

Jesus agrees with George Carlin, "The essence of life is trying to find a place to put all your stuff."²⁰ Carlin's Hippy-Dippy Weather Man once said, "The forecast for tonight is dark, with widely scattered light in the morning." We're still waiting for some of that light aren't we?"

A wealthy father once took his son to show the boy how poor people can be. They spent a couple of days and nights on the farm of what would be considered a poor family. On the way home, the father asked, "How was the trip?"

"It was great, Dad."

"Did you see how poor people can be?"

"Oh yeah," said the son.

"So what did you learn?"

"I saw that we have one dog, and they have four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of our garden; they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lanterns in our garden; they have stars at night. Our patio reaches to the front yard; they have the whole horizon.... We buy our food; they grow theirs. We have walls around our property to protect us; they have friends to protect them."

His father was speechless.

The son added, "Thanks, Dad, for showing me how poor we are."²¹

The question is, "Who's rich, and who's poor?" It depends on whose eyes you're looking through, and if the lights are on in your soul. Jesus was rich; all the resources of heaven were for him and through him to us. What if we simplified? What if we decluttered? What if we shifted our investment strategy to something more secure? What if we asked Jesus to turn up his candle-power so we could see each other and our world clearly? What's Jesus after? I'm told by those who knew him best that he's after it all; it is the only way he can save us.

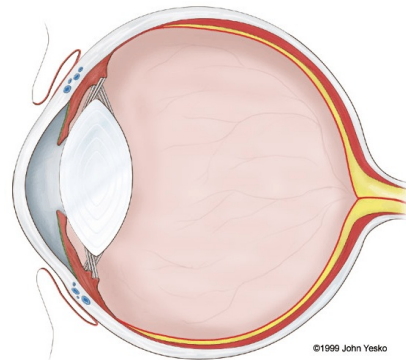
²⁰ <https://sermons.logos.com/submissions/10904-Life-is-more-Luke-12-13-31#content=/submissions/10904>.

²¹ Ron Blue, *Faith-based Family Finances* (Wheaton, ILL: Tyndale, 2008), 29-30.

Two Views Of Sight In the Ancient World

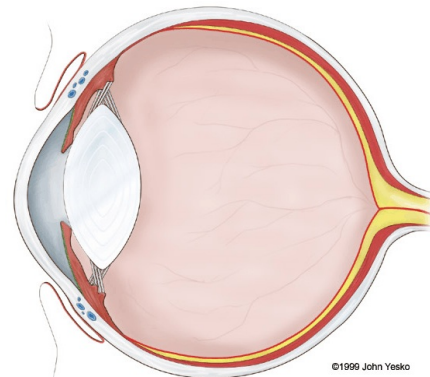
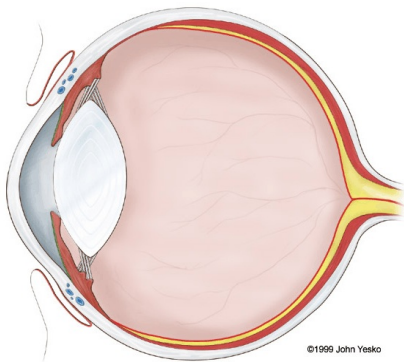
- 1. The *Outside-to-Inside* Model (intromission = the eye receives light) . . . Epicurus and Lucretius

Vision occurs as objects omit images that float into the eye (Eye as a window)
This model is later validated by scientific observation, e.g. the retina receives light from outside.



- 2. The *Inside-to-Outside* Model (extramission = the eye emits light) Plato and Philo

Vision occurs by means of light passing from the inside out through the eyes (Eye as a window)
This model is scientifically wrong but true as a metaphor for one’s worldview = how one sees.



Option 1: Light within = self is full of light

Option 2: No light within = self is full of darkness

“The eye is the lamp of the body”
Lamp is to house (within) as light is to eye (within)

“how great is the darkness” = an *evil eye*

Here the eye itself is not the cause of sin but rather the “inner light” that has turned to “darkness.” Here the eye reflects the orientation of the self, ones *worldview*. We see as we are. If I view the world as scarcity, I will live stingy and greedy and fearful. If I view the world (and God) as abundant, then I will live generously and without much anxiety. How did Jesus see the world? How does he heal moral blindness? Jesus is not giving a global political or economic theory (e.g. a utopia); he’s pointing out idolatry and false worship among his disciples. What is a kingdom vision? To live simply, be wary of the idolatrous power of money, trust God, practice generosity.