ESSAY · MAY 20, 2020

What did Jesus Mean? "The Eye is the Lamp of the Body"

Written by Bill Perkins

I believe if God “opened our eyes” so we could witness a reality that goes beyond sight, we would see ourselves with Christ in the heavenlies surrounded by a host of angels (Colossians 3:1-3; Isaiah 6:1-3). This reality is as certain as the invisible systems and infrastructure that surround us—a hidden world of webs and waves that come from cell towers, routers, satellites, and more.

Apart from a vision, or other sudden revelation from God, we will never see this with physical eyes. Apart from a special revelation, we must train ourselves to accept *the presence of unseen spiritual reality*—training this book will provide. The author of Hebrews tells us that faith is “being convinced of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). And what we cannot see is that we share Christ’s resurrection life.

The Importance of Clear Eyes

To possess such faith our spiritual eyes must be healthy so we can see clearly. Jesus spoke of this in Matthew 6:22-23: “The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. [23] 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!”

Between two bookends of teaching about treasuring God in heaven more than money on earth, Jesus stated a truth: how someone views reality determines whether their heart is filled with darkness or light. A good eye allows light into the heart. A bad eye keeps it out.

The only other place Jesus mentioned a “bad eye” is Matthew 20:15 where he told the parable of the wealthy landowner who hired four groups of workers throughout the day. He promised to pay the first group a denarius[1] for the day’s labor. He promised each of the remaining three groups a fair wage. When the workday ended, he paid all the workers a denarius.

Those who worked throughout the day complained to the landowner that he had treated them unfairly. He said, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?’ [16] So the last will be first, and the first last?” (Matthew 20:14-15 NKJ). The “evil” eye here and the “bad” eye in Matthew six are the same.

The bad eye speaks of a disease eye which prevents a person from seeing redemption in every situation. It prevents us from seeing every loss, or potential loss, through the eyes of Jesus’ resurrection. John Piper described it this way: “It is the eye that is blind to what is truly beautiful and bright and precious and God-like. It is a worldly

eye”[i]

We all have a bad eye from time to time. But we can choose to see the world through good eyes. That is, from the perspective of our identity in Christ. From that vantage point:

Every loss is gain.

Every disappointment, hope.

Every temptation, victory.

Every challenge, courage.

Every stronghold, freedom.

Every sin, repentance.

Every demon, rebuked.

Every wrong, forgiven.

Every need, supply.

Every dream, perseverance.

That's how a good eye views the world.

---

[1] A denarius was a Roman coin valued at a day’s wages for labor. In 2020 terms its value would be around $75.

---

[i] Piper John, The Eye Is the Lamp of the Body. A Meditation on Matthew 6:19-24). Desiring God, January 29, 2003 (online article)