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Sermon Series: *Laugh Therapy 6*

Perspective

June 11, 2023

**Matthew 6:19-24 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>22</sup> "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup> 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!

<sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

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We're in the midst of a series on laughter, this gift God has given to humanity, and all the benefits that come along with it.

And today we're in the book of Matthew and Jesus' words in the sixth chapter, where, I believe, He's talking primarily about *perspective*, which is an important ingredient in our ability to laugh.

Perspective: how we look at things.

The sinking of the Titanic was an enormous human tragedy, to be sure. But if you happened to be a lobster in the tank of the Titanic's kitchen, it was an absolute miracle!

That's perspective, you see?

Two men are on opposite sides of a river.

The first man shouts: "How do I get to the other side?"

The second shouts back: "You're already on the other side!"

That's perspective – and having the right one is necessary for true joy and laughter.

This whole Matthew passage, from verse 19 through 24, talks about the danger that earthly financial success – the chasing after wealth – can have on the follower of Jesus.

In verse 19 there, Jesus tells us, essentially, "*Don't waste your time storing up treasures on earth. Instead, invest yourself in treasures in heaven – in the life after this life.*"

That's pretty easy to understand, right?

It also can be pretty hard to live out, day to day.

So often we live like this is all there is.

Jesus says not to do that. That's how He begins.

Then at the close of the section, verse 24, Jesus declares how no one can sit on the fence regarding this issue of investing ourselves in either this world or in the world to come.

He starts with a parable-like statement about masters and how no one can serve two of them.

But since He knows that sometimes we're too dense to truly get the point of parables, He clarifies with the

simple declaration, "*You can't serve both God and money.*"

Just as a person can't walk in two directions at the same time, no one can chase after both God (eternal success) and money (earthly success). And so, we have to choose who or what will master us.

That's Jesus' closing statement of this passage.

But then, there's this middle part that can seem kind of hazy and harder to grab hold of: this notion that "*the eye is the lamp of the body.*"

What does that mean? And how does it relate to what comes before and what follows?

Well, this is actually the core of it all, because this is where Jesus addresses perspective.

Today, in our age of technology and medical science, we think of the eye as – actually, we know that the eye is – a receiver of light and image.

It comes in, hits the retina, is turned upside down and backward, and is then sent on to the brain where we see what is out there.

Today, we understand that the eye is a *receiver* of light.

But in Jesus' day, people understood the eye to be *not* a *receiver*, but a *projector* of light that lit up the world around them, so they could see their surroundings – so they could see their world, rightly.

And you know, strange as it sounds – both understandings of the eye are correct.

The first is correct *medically*.

But the second is just as correct *philosophically* and *theologically*, because we determine importance, priority and reality in our lives by *how* we see.

That is perspective, and setting perspective is up to us.

On this side, the wealth of the world says to us, "Because of your good credit, you are among the elite chosen to receive a Gold Card – so you can borrow more, so you can buy more, so you can have more!"

But on the other side, we hear God saying, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.*"

So, what will we choose? What will be reality for us?

It depends on how we see. It depends on perspective.

Wealth cries out, "Indulge yourself – you've earned it!"

But God says, "*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.*"

What will be reality in our lives? It depends on perspective.

Wealth says, "Live the good life!"

God says, "*Live a good life.*"

The voice of God and the voice of our world, far more often than not, pull us in opposite directions, so we

have to determine, day to day, encounter to encounter, and message to message, which we'll follow – which is right.

And we do that by the way we see: through right perspective.

We set perspective in here [point to heart], and through that perspective we see our world. That's why Jesus reminds us to set perspective carefully and prayerfully so we can see and respond to the messages of our world – and live as God intends us to live.

So, how do we set perspective?

How do you set your perspective?

How do your eyes see – how do your eyes illumine – and interpret the world?

Do you think about it at all?

Jesus says we have to think about it, and we have to intentionally act on it, because, you see, by default – by our nature, which, remember, is broken and corrupt from birth – most of us believe that our perspective is naturally correct.

Most of us think that the world can be seen through a million different perspectives: our own, and 999,999 *wrong* ones.

We're born self-centered. We're born thinking that we see all things correctly and that we're right about everything.

But when we give ourselves to Jesus, and God takes over more and more real estate in our hearts, that purifying work of His Spirit begins challenging our perspectives and we have to adjust. We have to adjust how our eyes see our world in response to the truth in our lives as imparted by His Word and His Spirit.

And let me say, God doesn't adjust perspective by force. It's all by invitation: He invites us to let Him make those adjustments. He invites us to let Him "correct our vision," you might say.

And it takes a certain amount of courage and conviction on our part to let Him do that – to make those changes.

You know, when people live for years believing certain things – seeing the world in certain ways, it's not hard for God to change them, but it is sometimes hard for us to let Him make changes.

People who were born into racist families and so were conditioned for years to see people either not of their *color* or not of their *caste* or not of their *social standing* in uncharitable ways. People like that can find a change of perspective pretty hard to consider.

People whose families have always thought certain things about rich people, or about poor people, or about educated or uneducated people, or about people from certain parts of our nation or our world, do not begin naturally to see those people differently.

If we grew up with a steady diet of how important social status is, or how important money is, or how important being popular is, or how much better this group is than another, then those patterns of seeing the world are well-burned into our eyes – to the point that we may well not even be aware of them. And so, in that

sense, our perspectives can be hard for us to even see honestly.

Thus, the chances are, we'll never change them ourselves.

There almost always has to be some catalyst that forces us to question how we see, which is exactly what Jesus is doing here.

*"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness."*

He's not talking about cataracts here – or glaucoma.

He's saying that how we see our world – our perspectives about reality – affect everything else about us.

And again, it's not hard for God to change our perspectives.

The hard part, often, is for us to give Him the room to do it, especially when the world around us, the people we've perhaps known and loved for years, say something different.

But following Jesus, maturing in Christ, means that we do it in response to Him – in response to what He says.

Because regardless of what the world around us says and does, it's God's way that is right, and that's the conviction we must have. That's the faith we must live by in order to see as God sees – to adopt God's perspective – and to be, as Jesus says we need to be, "full of light."

It requires right perspective.

A Jewish father has a son who decides he is going to convert to Christianity. That makes the man very distressed, so he decides to ask a Jewish friend of his for advice.

"It's funny you should come to me," his friend says, "because my son did the same thing, not even a month after moving out on his own. I was probably more upset than you seem to be, but I eventually realized that he's always going to be my son. And he still celebrates the high holidays with us, and we'll sometimes visit his house for Christmas, and if anything, I might say it's actually made our family stronger."

The father goes home and thinks on this, but he still can't help being upset, no matter what he says to himself in his head.

So, he goes to talk to his rabbi about it.

"It's funny you should come to me," the rabbi begins, "because my own son became a Christian when he went off to college. Wanted to become an Anglican priest, he did! Whether I like it or not, though, he's still my son, my flesh and blood, and I couldn't stop loving him for a thing like that. It also means that when we talk about God together, he brings a perspective I might not hear otherwise, and so, you know, in some ways, I'm actually glad it happened."

Again, the father goes home to think on this, but still, all he wants to do is yell and scream at his son for what he's doing.

So, he gets down on his knees and prays, "Lord, please help me. My son is becoming a Christian, and it's tearing me apart. I don't know what to do. Would you please help me?"

And he hears God reply, "It's funny you should come to me..."

Perspective, you see?

How we understand and interpret the world around us changes everything, and for our purposes today, it's right perspective that allows us to laugh.

Without God's perspective informing our own perspective about our crazy world, we would have no good reason to laugh, because things are hard here.

Inflation is high; jobs are uncertain; our leaders are corrupt; housing is scarce; immorality is rampant; crime and homelessness and poverty and racism are growing. Our world is full of floods and fires and wars. People we love are sick.

Things are hard. That's the reality of our world.

When I went to Russia for the first time a few years ago, I remember being told, "When you pass strangers on the street, you shouldn't smile at them or greet them happily, because if you do, they'll think you're an uninformed idiot who doesn't understand that life is hard and offers no reason to be happy."

That's how they think, and they think that way because life *is* hard—that's the reality of the world. That's the reality of *our* world—and compared to nearly all the rest of the world, we have it great here! Believe me, I just got back from Africa.

Our world is broken, and life is hard.

**But**, those in Christ know that the mechanisms of power and influence here are not all there is. This world is not just a closed system of brokenness and hardship and pain.

No—God is at work here.

God steps into this world and rights wrongs and cures illness and punishes the unjust.

God rewards the righteous.

God blesses the faithful.

God intervenes in the lives of His people.

At times, God even breaks the natural laws and order of things that He Himself created—for the sake of His own glory and for the love of His creation.

He doesn't always do these things, and it's impossible for us to predict exactly when and how He will.

But He has, and He does, and He will, always, bring good to the lives of those who will love Him and follow Him.

And, one day He will set all things right here again—when Jesus returns to claim His throne.

And those facts (that God works in our world out of love for us, and that one day God will completely redeem and restore our world), when those facts color the way we see, then we have something to laugh about.

He has not left us as orphans.

He is with us.

He sees our needs.

He knows the injustices and suffering we face, and He is always at work (helping, empowering, uplifting, carrying, strengthening, and using even suffering) to help us become more like Jesus and to help us become worthy of being who we are: the Church, the very bride of Christ.

*That is reality*, and when we see reality *rightly*—when we see as God sees—we can laugh with true relief and joy and peace.

Actually, we can laugh because God laughs.

Psalm 37 tells us, "*the Lord laughs at the wicked, for He sees that His day is coming*" (vv. 12-13).

Psalm 59: God laughs at those who set themselves against his chosen ones (v. 8, paraphrase).

In Psalm 2, God laughs at the world's corrupt leaders as they plan and scheme to destroy Him and those He loves because He knows they will never succeed.

God's laughter warns traitors of their impending doom.

And God's laughter reminds His own that, not only is all well and good, but even more: our best is yet to come.

You see, God's laughter acknowledges that far more is going on here than just what we can see with our physical eyes.

God's laughter arises from right vision—right perspective—and amazing as it is, He invites us to see, and to laugh, with Him.

And in order to do that—to grasp the true reality of our world and laugh with God, we have to see with eyes of faith and trust in Him.

Physical eyes won't do it. We can't just receive into us the light of this world as it's offered.

No—we have to see with spiritual eyes.

Even before we open our physical eyes to the world and its messages, we have to decide that we are going to let our faith illumine what we see and how we see it.

And that decision, that choice, is ours to make.

We choose our perspective.

Here in Matthew 6, Jesus spoke of all this specifically with regard to money and wealth.

If we see wealth as the world sees it, and allow wealth to dominate our thoughts and prayers, we are immature; we will never rest in God's care and we will never truly be able to laugh.

But, of course, how we see applies to all parts of life—not just wealth.

If we want to live in freedom from the world's overwhelming preoccupation with politics, health, wealth and troubles, we have to choose to see as God sees, knowing He holds power far greater than any of these—and knowing those who trust Him will win in the end.

We have to choose the right perspective—His perspective.

I wonder if there are some here today who are trying to please both God and the world around?

Jesus says we can't do it—there is no peace, no freedom, no laughter in that.

If God is asking you, in some specific way today, to begin to see as He sees – to adopt His perspective, why don't you agree to do that? Why not say "yes" to Him?

He does the work of correcting vision, but we have to choose to let Him. We have to invite Him to do the work.

It's like Cassius said to Brutus in Julius Caesar: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves."

We have to choose to adopt God's vision – God's perspective.

That's where the freedom is.

That's where the truth is.

That's where the real laughter of life begins.

If there is someplace God is saying, "Oh child, let me change your vision. Let me change your perspective about this so you can see clearly, so you're not bound with worry or anxiety anymore, so you can be free even to laugh!"

If God is pointing out a place like that in your life, would you come and place your vision on the altar today? Let Him give you His vision, His perspective.

Closing Prayer

Closing Song: *Teach Me Thy Way, O Lord*

Benediction:

One day when I was a little kid, I was riding in the car with my dad down a steep, curvy hill with a deep valley on one side.

On the last curve we hit ice and started spinning around and I thought, "We're going to die!"

The next thing I remember was the car stopped. It was on the gravel shoulder of the road, facing up the hill, and my dad was sitting there behind the steering wheel, laughing!

Never did my dad's laughter sound so good to me as at that moment, because it said to me, "Everything is going to be just fine." That was quite a ride, but all is well.

David Mathis writes, "The laughter of God is simultaneously horrible and wonderful: horrible for those who oppose Him, but wonderful for His children, who hear in His laughter the greatest joys in all the world and echo back His contagious laughter in their own."<sup>1</sup>

May we all see our world rightly – with the perspective of God – so that even though we have hard and scary days, we can also laugh with Him – because we know that all will be well.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/god-laughs-out-loud-to-quiet-our-fears>