



FIRST PREZ HONOLULU
SERMON TEXT

**“WHERE IS YOUR EYE?”
(TRUST Sermon Series)
by Pastor Timmy Fearer
Sunday, August 25, 2024**

We are in Week Two of our series called Trust. We're with Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount and the series is all about where you place your trust in life – in what, in whom. Where do you take your anxiety and try to make it go away? How do you do that? Jesus, for starters, takes us right into the topic of money and possessions where all of us, to one degree or another, take our anxiety, and we place our trust, and we try to find our security, try to soothe our anxiety in wealth. Last week, this was where Jesus was taking us.

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.” In other words, that's not a very good location to invest, to place your ultimate trust. Earthly things are just not all that reliable. They're not durable. That's a weak investment.

“Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, but store up for yourselves instead treasures in heaven,” Jesus says, “where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Everything is durable there in the heavenly places. It's a good location for investments.

What did we say that really meant? Well, it meant investing in people, loving well, conforming yourself, being conformed to the image of Christ, getting ready for eternity by getting ready to live fully now. That's good counsel.

Jesus gave us a tip for how to tell where your treasure is. He said, in verse 21, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” In other words, what gets your time, what gets your imagination, what gets your love – that's your treasure and that's where your heart is. Of course, where your treasure and heart are, that's where you are. That's where you're placing your trust. That's where you're placing yourself. Is that going to last? Are you going to last?

So, picking up from last week, where are you today? What has you? Where is your treasure and where's your heart? Next week, the question is going to be, “Who's your master?” It's all about money and possessions again. This week, the question is, “Where is your eye?” How is your eye? Jesus wants to know. Sounds like a medical exam. In a sense, it is. Here is today's passage.

Matthew 6:22-23

²² The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; ²³ but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

That's kind of cryptic. What on earth is he talking about? Let's walk through this.

Verse 22 says, "The eye is the lamp of the body." That sounds like a thesis statement he's going to unpack, which he's going to do, a statement about what the eye is and this is from an ancient, pre-modern point of view commonly held at the time. We don't hold this view anymore, but ancient people did. It's the idea that the eye itself, or the eyes, were generators of light, actually functioning like a lamp, a lamp of the body as Jesus says. The eye is its own source of light, generating light, light going forth from the eye – not light coming in through the eye, but light going out from the eye – a healthy eye sends light out into the world.

Let me give you some biblical examples of this kind of thinking, and we see it in an exaggerated form in these first two examples from two dream visions, the first one from the Old Testament, Daniel 10:6. This is of a vision of a man: "eyes like flaming torches." Let's go to another dream vision from Revelation 1:14. This is a vision of Jesus in John's dream. He sees Jesus with "eyes were like a flame of fire." Then let's hear a more normalized view of people in general, light in their eyes associated with life within them from Psalm 38:10. "My heart throbs, my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes – it also has gone from me." In other words, health is leaving the psalmist. He's struggling. He's going down. Again in Psalm 13:3. "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death." This is a complaint Psalm or complaint prayer. You can see this idea that the eye is the lamp embedded in the body, and the light in the eye is associated with life inside.

Now, there's some kind of a correspondence with the way that we actually experience people in the modern world. If your eyes are bright and you're clear and shining, we think, "He's having a good day. She's in good shape." But if your eyes are dull in appearance, we're going to ask, "Are you okay? What's the matter?"

Jesus continues with this first observation, back to the ancient view in Matthew 6:22. "So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light." That's not about a healthy eye makes for a healthy body, a healthy person. It's about a healthy body, a healthy person, makes for a healthy eye. This is consistent with the Psalms.

This is a lot of background here, but it's important for where Jesus is taking this. Read it this way: if your eye is a healthy, life-giving lamp, that is an indication of your whole body, your whole person being healthy and full of what makes your eye a healthy, life-giving lamp. That's the ancient thinking: healthy body, healthy life results in healthy, lit-up, bright eyes. That's the first observation Jesus is making.

Now Jesus continues with his second observation in Matthew 6:23. "But if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness." That's the reverse. Healthy eye, healthy body. Eye that is unhealthy indicates an unhealthy inside, an unhealthy source in the person. So, up to this point, everybody who is listening is thinking that Jesus is talking about physical anatomy, physical structure, physical health – ancient, pre-modern view. And now he's saying if your eye is unhealthy, if your eye is bad, if you have a bad eye – that's what the Greek text actually says – that would mean you

have a bad condition within, darkness within you, thus, no lamp burning, no spreading of light. But what's interesting is that a "bad eye," that phrase in Jesus' time could be loaded with other meanings too. A bad eye was also a term, a phrase for a grudging, self-centered spirit. A bad eye would be the opposite of generosity, the opposite of a giving spirit. A bad eye could mean an envious disposition, even hatred of other people. A bad eye could be a beguiling eye, an impudent eye, an evil eye.

For example, some of you are familiar with Jesus' parable of the workers that's found in Matthew 20. This story is about workers who were hired at different times during the day, but they were all paid the same wage by the landowner. The guys working from early morning are complaining about the guys who were hired toward the end of the day who were nevertheless paid the full day's wage. This is a parable about the generosity of God, the mercy and the grace of God – same amount given no matter what time you came into the action, whether you came early or whether you came late. In the parable, Jesus has the landowner responding to these grumbling workers who have worked all day. They're getting the same amount as the guys who came in at 5pm. This is what he has the landowner saying: "Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?" In other words, "... pay whatever I wish to workers?" Of course he is. He has that right. But then the landowner says to the complainers, "Or is your eye evil?" Actually, "Is your eye bad?" It's the same word, the same phrase we have in our teaching today. "Is your eye bad because I am generous, because I am good? Are you envious because I'm generous? Do you begrudge my generosity because you don't have generosity in you?"

So, back to our passage. Jesus is turning the-eye-is-a-lamp talk into a moral, spiritual teaching framed by two separate teachings – last week's and next week's – on what do I do with my wealth, my money, and my possessions? Today he says, "If your eye is unhealthy, if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If you are selfish, if you are greedy on the inside, you're going to look with your bad eye at everything on the outside from the perspective of your own selfish and greedy inside, and you're going to act accordingly. You will. That is how a thief sees the world.

I was recently home in Los Angeles, where I own a condominium, right in the center of the sprawl, the metro. I love Los Angeles. I'm up on a hill. I have a nice view. On our street, sometimes we'll see people we don't know walking along looking into the cars parked along the street. What are they doing? They're seeing if there's anything in those cars that attracts them, that they can come back later at night, when everybody's asleep, break into the car, and take it. I remember living in another home in Southern California years ago, and there was a guy parked out in front of my house in an old station wagon. He was just parked there. Across the street, my neighbor had a lot of things in his garage, which was wide open. He had a really nice air compressor right at the front of the garage, near the door. About an hour later, the car was gone and the compressor was gone from the guy's garage. What was inside that guy and what kind of a bad eye did he have just looking at that air compressor?

Do you know the 10th Commandment? "You shall not covet." Covet is not a word that we use, but it's basically saying you shall not start wanting your

neighbor's stuff – his house, his wife, his servants, his things. It's the only Commandment that's a psychological commandment. Everything else is sort of hands-on action, but this one is about attitude. It's about what's inside of you that then produces a good eye or an evil eye. Moses is saying, “Don't get that evil eye going that you want your neighbor's things.”

If then the light in you is darkness, if that's what you have in you – selfishness and greed – how great is that darkness? Inner light leads to loving neighbor. Inner darkness leads to miserly, selfish, ungenerous spirit and wanting your neighbor's stuff, and that darkness is vast. The place in you is where light should be, if instead it's filled with darkness, that's a serious, terrible condition to be in. This is what Jesus is saying to us today.

So, what do we do about all that? How can we address that? How can we find out where we are, whether there's light in us, or there's darkness in us? That goes back to the teaching last week. This is a series that builds on itself. Where's your treasure? That'll tell you where your heart is and where you're placing your trust.

In our Spiritual Steps of the Week last week, we explored this. Remember, I asked you to make a list of all the things you were investing in, all the things that were getting your time, your imagination, your energy, your love, your money. Make an extensive list.

Step two was to evaluate how lasting your investments are. Are you investing yourself in things that moth and rust can get to, that thieves can break in and take, or are you investing in things that are enduring, loving people? Today, let's ask

the question, “How generous are you? How free on the inside are you to give and to give away.

Last week, I told you about my Turkish carpets, how I bought my first carpet in 2012, and one carpet turned into 16 carpets, and that I brought several with me to Hawaii. I want to show you a couple. Here's a carpet that I brought that I have in my office just down the hall.



This next one is in my living room in my home in Kaimuki. That's a Kurdish carpet from Eastern Turkey.



Sixteen in total. What I didn't tell you is that I used to have more than 16.

And what I didn't tell you was that I started giving them away. I can be really protective, really fussy about my carpets. I have the staff in my office and we're eating, and I'm going to roll up my carpet just to keep the food off. We've got a sloppy staff. I can be fussy and protective, so it's actually really good for me to give the carpets away. It's good for my soul to give them away.

We're talking about possessions which can hold and possess you. The best way to break their hold, if you've got a lot of that darkness in you that just wants to hold on and not share and protect – be more focused on the carpets or fill in the blank for whatever that is for you, rather than the people in the room – is for you to stop holding them. It's for you to let go of them. That's really good for the soul. It lights up your insides. It puts a light in your eyes.

Eyes are the lamp of the body. We could even say, in the modern world, you can tell a lot about a person by the light and the look in their eyes. To see the eyes of another person light up when you give them a carpet, or whatever it is – something valuable, something that's beautiful, something that will last. Moths do get to Turkish carpets after 150 years. They last a long time. It's good for the soul of the receiver to get something of value from you. It lights up their insides. Generosity, which is what Jesus is talking about, is contagious. It's a virus. It spreads. It's actually one of our First Prez Values. When we say “the grace and truth of Jesus,” grace is a word for the generosity of Jesus. He's handing out all kinds of things, including forgiveness.

It is Compassion International Sunday here. That's a tradition that you have. How is your eye today? Where is your eye? What's happening inside of you, in your body and your heart, when you see the need of another person? I took on a Compassion child five years ago for the first time, when I was serving at our sister church in Milpitas, California. That's in Silicon Valley, east end of the Santa Clara Valley. At one time, that congregation supported more than 1,000 children. You could say they're a sister church with you, because that's part of your story, isn't it? We have a long history with Compassion. We have all those photos out in the hall. Many of you have been walking past those for a long time, if you've been around here for a long time, photos that are proof of all the children that we've invested in. How many photos? How many kids are there on those walls? 1,527 photos and kids, and it's been eight years since we updated the photos, although we have added kids. Over time, through your church, First Prez, you can claim a total of Well, no one actually seems to know, which is kind of nice. It's just gotten so vast, we've lost track, but certainly hundreds more than eight years ago. And currently we're supporting many hundreds of children. Then there are those kids who are supported by you independently, for those who didn't go through the church account. You went through your own initiative. My guy, whom I sponsored five years ago, is Khalid. He lives in Ethiopia. He is 15 years old now. I'm going to take on another kid this morning. That's better than giving away carpets. It's good for my inside. It's good for my eyes. It's good for my heart.

James, the half brother of Jesus, says in his New Testament letter that bears his name, in so many words, “Show me your outside work so I can see

the condition of your inside heart.” Here’s the passage.

James 2:15-18

¹⁵ *If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food,*
¹⁶ *and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill’, and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?* ¹⁷ *So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.* ¹⁸ *... I by my works will show you my faith.*

In other words, my outside deeds reveal my inside condition, where my treasure is, where my heart is, how my eye is, how free I am, or how unfree I am in my heart. Again, the eye is the lamp of the body. And so if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.

This is not a “should” sermon. You should do this. You should do that. This is a “heart” sermon. I would say to you, whatever you do with your money, with your possessions, with your wealth, whatever you have, it’s got to come from your heart, from your healthy, full of light, full of trust in God, set free on the inside heart. So, rather than telling you what you should do, instead, I just want to pray for you, that God would give you such a heart, that God would expand that heart in you that already exists there. But before I pray for you, we’ve got Spiritual Steps. Here they are.

SPIRITUAL STEPS OF THE WEEK:

Prayer of Self-Examination: the invitation is to ask yourself (and God) at lunch and at dinnertime:

1. What have been my generous and my non-generous actions over the last few hours?

2. And what do they tell me about my heart?
3. Be still and listen.

That’s your homework. Let me pray for you.

Father, we want to have tremendous eyesight because of a tremendous, large, generous, expansive inside and heart that lights up our eyes, that gives us the ability to see what’s happening around us and to respond to it with generosity. Build that more and more in this church. That is part of the beating heart of this church and has been over the years. Make it bigger. Make it greater in us individually, and as a body, as a church `ohana. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who was so generous he gave himself even unto death. We pray in His name. Amen.