

Light and Darkness

Matthew 6:22-24

Matthew is imitating the style of John just a bit in our text this afternoon, for he is using a very simple and common image to represent the fullness of God's glory and self-revelation. The image is light, and John's words are the more familiar,

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."

And, John 12:46 "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness."

1 John 1:5 "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

So God is light. Jesus is light. And we are to walk in the light. In a certain sense, that is as simple as the gospel gets. The image is easy to understand. What you believe about God is represented by what you see. What you believe, your faith, is represented by the physical light that shines into your eyes. Your faith is represented by that which visible to your eyes. And, of course, that is the function of light, to make objects visible so that you can see.

So now, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about your eyes. "The lamp of the body." And the point is not that your eyes are the light by which you live, the source of your light. It is not that you have within yourself all the light that is necessary for life,

for actually, Scripture tells us the opposite. Our moral and spiritual condition before God, after the fall, is called darkness. Blindness. It is God alone who supplies the light.

In the book of Revelation, we see the hypocrisy in the church of Laodicea clearly exposed, and rebuked. They thought themselves so strong and advanced, so self-sufficient and self-satisfied even in the presence of God. But Jesus would say this to them,

Rev. 3:17 "Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing"—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked."

The reality they missed was that they were blind. And that's important because the gospel is the message of light to give sight to those who are blind. Or, as Paul puts it in,

2 Cor. 4:3 "But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

So that's my job this afternoon as well, to proclaim to you "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." And I do that by preaching Jesus, and him crucified.

But back to the words of Jesus in our text. "The lamp of the body is the eye." I believe the straight-forward idea of those words is something like this, that we live by the truth about God which we come to know and believe, and we come to know and

believe that truth in the same way that our eyes enable us to see and to know the world around us in which we live. So our eyes as a lamp are not the source of light, but rather the means by which we receive light. “The lamp of the body is the eye” means that we must receive the light of God in order to live. You must believe the truth of God in order to live.

Let me read the verses again,
v.22-23

Let me make a broad and general statement as we begin to unpack these verses, a statement about our lives as Christians. Actually, a statement about our lives as human beings.

I. WE EXIST AS WHOLE HUMAN BEINGS.

Which is what I believe is the reason for the emphasis on the relationship between the eye and the body. Perhaps I could put it this way to make my point, you can’t separate the eye from the body. Or, in other words, if the eye is healthy, the body is healthy. If if not, if the eye is bad, so too is the whole body. Jesus’ focus is the whole body, considered as a whole. A unified whole. An inseparable whole.

So you can’t marginalize God. You can’t marginalize his word. You can’t compartmentalize God, putting him over here, in this part of your life, while at the same time, over here, you live as though God doesn’t exist. That is the general approach of many people today, however, considering their religion as something you believe privately, but something that doesn’t have much to do with the rest of your life. You claim religion, you claim a religious faith, but your life doesn’t change. Your behavior isn’t affected. Your sin isn’t addressed.

There are a lot of professed Christians in this part of our

country especially, who would fit that description. The Bible belt has produced that sort of empty religion, where a person claims to be a Christian but then parts of his life, or even most of his life, with no reference whatsoever to God. In verses 22 and 23 Jesus is saying that cannot be!

v.22-23

To put that positively,

A. We must live our whole lives by the light of God.

“The lamp of the body is the eye.” So the eye receives the light of God, and it shines that light everywhere. “If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.”

The word “good” there means singular. Uncomplicated. Or clear. Without any specks of dust, no imperfection at all. Or to extend the analogy, no cataracts. If your eye is healthy, if there are no cataracts to cloud your vision, then your whole life will be affected and impacted by the light of God’s word in the gospel.

If your eye is healthy, is the lamp of your eye is healthy, then your whole life will be well. Your whole life will be set forth in the sight of God. These words would then describe you, you whose eye is healthy.

Ps. 19:7 “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes...10 More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”

If your eye is healthy, then this, too would be true of you,

Ps. 1:1 “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat

of the scornful; 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.”

So, “If ... your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.” So consider your own eyes today. Is your eye healthy? Don’t let the figurative language soften the impact of that very penetrating question. Is your eye healthy? Does your eye rightly, regularly, and consistently receive the light of God’s word and shine it upon every detail of every situation of your life? That is the question to consider, and the challenge to hear this afternoon.

Does the light of God make you wise? Do the commandments of the Lord rejoice your heart? Do you treasure God’s word more than gold? Is the light of God’s word sweeter than honey?

For some, the warning of the angel of the Lord to the church in Ephesus might be the most appropriate given the temptations which they are most likely to face ourselves.

Rev. 2:2 “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; 3 and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. 4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.”

So when you are tempted to abandon your first love, hear this call to repent. And pursue what Jesus describes in our text this afternoon, “If ... your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light.”

I have known many people over the years who have had cataract surgery, and almost all of them speak of how beneficial that surgery was. I remember one man’s response particularly, because he so greatly appreciated the richness of the colors that he could again see after that surgery. And the effect of Jesus’ words to us in this text is for us to undergo that cataract surgery, so that your eye would again be good, be whole, be healthy. And with that, be careful, for,

B. We must beware the danger of trying to mix light and darkness.

For Jesus puts this message in a negative form as well.

v.23 “But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!”

In other words, it’s one or the other. It is either light or darkness, all of one or all of the other. You can’t compartmentalize the darkness, either. If your eye is bad, then it is bad in every area of your life. So if you treasure sin in your heart, if you resist and rebel against the light of God’s word in your life, even in one area of your life, it will affect everything. Going back to John’s words in,

1 John 1:5 “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.”

So let me go back to Jesus’ words about himself spoken shortly before he was crucified, and use those words as both an invitation of the gospel and a challenge to you who are Christians.

John 12:35 “A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know where he is going. 36 While you

have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”

Did you catch that? “He who walks in darkness does not know where he is going.” So you can’t fool yourself into thinking you can have it both ways, claiming to believe in the light but walking and living in darkness. You can’t claim to be a Christian and then disregard the light of God’s word in your life. You can’t pretend. “If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.” And even more as a warning, “If then the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness.”

So beware the danger of thinking as if you can mix light and darkness in your own life. Instead, live the whole of your life “in the light.” For then, this is your hope and your great encouragement,

1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Then we come to verse 24, and as I began this evening, let me say again, you are a whole person. That wholeness is again made evident here. You can’t serve God with one part of your heart, in one part of your life, while in this other part of your life over here you serve mammon, referring to all the treasures that are created in this world. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth,” from verse 19. You cannot serve God and those earthly treasures. Rather,

II. WE MUST SERVE GOD AS A WHOLE PERSON.

v.24

That’s not a command as much as it is a statement of fact. You can’t do it. The point is,

A. The impossibility of serving two masters.

They are mutually exclusive. It is an impossible pursuit, though so many people try. To some degree, we all try. Yet it is a tension that is insurmountable in the heart of a man created in the image of God.

To use an illustration, that’s why a marriage relationship is, of necessity, between one man and one woman. The marriage relationship is designed to be exclusive, because it is impossible to give your absolute and utmost faithfulness to two different people. It defies logic. It defies definition. If you are faithful to one wife, or husband, then there will only be one. That’s the point, isn’t it? Faithfulness is exclusive.

As soon as you have two masters, you are unable to give both of them your undivided loyalty, because if there are two masters, you are already divided. It’s so logical. And so personal. Such a personal rebuke to us all. We all think that its different for us. I can do it. I can serve God, but still serve that earthly treasure over there. I can serve God, but still devote myself to this particular earthly pleasure over here. I can serve God, but still live in the darkness over here in this area of my life.

But the words of Scripture are so convincing. “If we say we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” The one who walks in the darkness does not know where he is going.

The reality is that you cannot serve two masters. Try as hard as you might, it can’t be done. As Jesus explains so clearly,

v.24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other.”

I don't need to explain to you what these words mean, because the point is so obvious regarding,

B. The inevitable consequences of trying to serve two masters.

If you have to masters, you will face situations where you have to choose. You have to choose one or the other. Sooner or later, your allegiance will make itself known. Sooner or later, you will face a choice. In choosing to love the one, to serve the one master, you will have to reject and rebel against the other. You hate the one and love the other. Or the other way around. You will be devoted to the one, serving him faithfully, but in doing so you will despise the other.

Inevitable consequences.

Again, the challenge. Where, and how, do you attempt this impossible task yourself? Please consider that question deeply, even as you prepare your heart to take and receive the elements of the Lord's Supper. Examine your own heart, as David would pray,

Ps. 139:23 "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."

Search me, O God, and see if there are any ways in which I am attempting to serve two masters. Search me, O God, that I might see my own heart, and identify how I might be devoted to another master, offering to another master the loving service that I owe to you alone.

There is a reason why the Bible so often compares our sin to sexual immorality. There is a reason why idolatry and adultery are so deeply connected to each other. The essence of marital

adultery is this desire to serve two masters. The essence of all sin is attempt to offer to another master the love and service which God himself requires.

v.24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

So this is the first and great commandment,

Mat. 22:37 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."