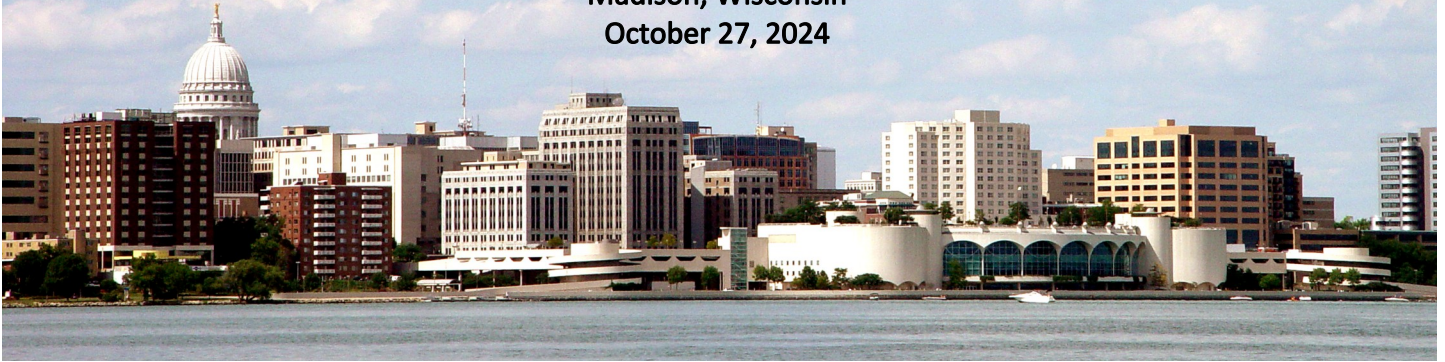


Eyes & Masters

Matthew 6:22-24

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Good morning, and welcome to the Four Lakes congregation. If you are visiting with us today, we are happy to have you with us, and we'd like to ask that you fill out a visitor card – either online or on a card from the pew in front of you. And we also invite you to pass along any questions or prayer concerns in that way. We are happy to have my sister with us from Washington this morning, and we'd like to thank you for remembering our family in your prayers this week.

In terms of our schedule, we plan on having a fellowship dinner after worship next Sunday. A while back, someone refused to come to a fellowship dinner and said it was because “Nobody told me what to bring.” So, I would just give some brief advice: Bring stuff you'd like to eat, and maybe a little extra for a guest, and let's just spend some bonus time together next Sunday! And then, following our meal, Caleb will be leading a study of the Fundamentals of Music, as well as some bonus information for songleaders. And this is for everybody – men and women, young and old, good singers and bad singers. A big part of our worship involves singing praise to God, and anything we do for God we'd like to do well. So, even if you personally are not a songleader, there is a huge value in learning more about music and singing. Caleb is encouraging us to bring a notebook and a pitch pipe. This sounds serious, and I hope to see all of you next Sunday afternoon.

We are here this morning to preach the good news that God loves us. He sent his Son Jesus to save us from sin: He died on the cross, he was buried, and he was raised up from the dead on the first day of the week. This is the good news, and we obey this good news by believing the message, by turning away from sin, by publicly confessing our faith in Jesus as being the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with Jesus in baptism (an immersion in water for the forgiveness of sins). And, as usual, we have several examples to share this week, starting with an update from somewhere in Ukraine. There wasn't much information on this one, other than the names Lyuba and Olga and the fact that the man baptizing these two women had studied at the Bear Valley Bible Institute (where I just attended some lectures in Denver last month). And I am continually amazed at how many baptisms we've been seeing in Ukraine. I'm not sure why we've seen so many, but people are apparently eager to hear the good news, and they are obeying it when they hear it, which is awesome.

This next one comes to us from the Westward Street Church of Christ in Texas City, Texas. They say, “The angels in Heaven are rejoicing as Michelle Tucker was baptized into Christ tonight! Welcome to the Church of Christ our dear sister!”

This next one comes to us from the Inner City Church of Christ in Baltimore. They say just, “Welcome to the Body of Christ Shirell Godwin.”

This next one comes to us from the Heritage Place congregation down in Birmingham, Alabama. They say that, “It was a great day yesterday as we welcomed a new sister in Christ “Monica Holland.”

I know we’ve had several, but I’ll share two more today, with both of these coming from the Lord’s church up in Sandpoint, Idaho. The one on the left came about a week ago, where they say, “Meet our new sister in Christ! Melissa was buried with Christ in baptism last night and has started walking her new life! (1 Peter 3:21-22, Colossians 2:12, Romans 6:4).” And the one on the right came in just a few days ago, where they say, “God be praised! Aaron was baptized into Christ last night! Prayers for his continued growth and walk in the Light.” And I just want to note that they have some awesome beards in north Idaho. I am looking forward to meeting my bearded brothers someday. As always, we share these pictures by way of encouragement and as our invitation to you to consider obeying the good news yourself. If we can help, if you’d like to study together, please let us know. We won’t stalk you, or harass you, or hunt you down, but we would love to study the word of God together. Pull me aside after worship, or give me a call or send a text to 608-224-0274.

Last Lord’s Day morning, we started taking some time to think about the storms and the flooding that’s been going on down south, and we took a moment to think about what we might grab from our homes if we only had minutes before something like that were to happen at our place. We talked about what is important to us; we talked about what we treasure – baby books, and photos, and important documents, and so on.

We spoke of these things to introduce a larger passage in the second half of Matthew 6, where Jesus speaks of what is truly important in life. We are headed for some thoughts from Jesus on anxiety, but we’ve started with these preliminary thoughts on what is truly important in life. And last week we learned that what we treasure here on this earth is temporary. Clothing wears out, our cars get destroyed by rust, and those items that may be more valuable can be stolen. Everything is temporary. Jesus, then, encourages us to lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, permanent treasure, *“for where your treasure is,”* he says, *“there will your hearts be also.”*

Today, as we get closer to the passage on anxiety (that we hope to study next week), Jesus continues sharpening our focus on what is truly important (and lasting) by using two more illustrations: Eyes and masters. Last week, then, we compared and contrasted two treasures (what is temporary as opposed to what is permanent). Well, this week we compare good eyes and bad eyes as well as two masters (God and money). And these comparisons may not seem too related at first, but as we dig in to the word this morning, I think we’ll see how all of these really do tie together. Since everything on this earth is temporary (including the earth itself), what we focus on and who or what we serve is important. What we treasure has a way of affecting our spiritual eyesight as well as our devotion or dedication to the Lord.

By the way, the image up here isn’t really related to today’s passage. I had a hard time finding an image that included both eyes and masters, so this is my view of the sunrise this past Thursday morning, as I had the privilege of hanging out with my dad on the sixth floor of St. Mary’s Hospital. They have some great people up there, Madison is a beautiful place, so we are looking out over Lake Monona this morning. Nevertheless, let’s continue looking at the Sermon on the Mount this morning, and today we’ll be looking at Matthew 6:22-24,

²² 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! ²⁴ No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

- I. As we think about what Jesus says here, let's start with the first illustration, where Jesus paints a picture for us by describing the EYE as the LAMP OF THE BODY.

He's saying that the eye is how light gets into the body. So, how the eye works affects not just the eye itself, but the whole body. And we understand this. If our eyes aren't working, that affects everything we do – how we get around, how we protect ourselves from danger, how we interact with the world around us, how we enjoy life. Earlier this week, we took my dad to an eye doctor appointment downtown Madison, and although we knew it would be a challenge to get him in and out of that appointment, we knew it was important, because our ability to see impacts almost everything we do.

Jesus, of course, is not really talking about physical sight, though, but he is using our physical eyesight to illustrate something spiritual. In context, then, in light of what we studied last week, hopefully most of us will understand that the Lord is really continuing this emphasis on what we treasure. What are we looking at? Where is our focus? And so, in this context, I think he's suggesting that what we set our eyes on has a way of impacting us spiritually.

On one hand, when we focus on what is truly important, when our eye is good, we have a healthy outlook on life (spiritually speaking). On the other hand, if our eye is dark, if we are focusing on what is not truly important in this life, then our spiritual perspective is skewed, our lives are out of focus. Spiritually speaking, then, our vision is either healthy or dark, clear or clouded.

To start with, the word he uses for *"clear"* (in verse 22) is a word that's in contrast to an eye that is *"bad"* (in verse 23). And *"bad"* carries with it the idea of morality – an *"evil"* eye or a *"wicked"* eye. To be *"clear,"* then, is the opposite of evil. So, we have a *"good"* eye and a *"bad"* eye. And the *"good"* or *"clear"* eye represents someone who is focused on what is truly important. Someone with a *"clear"* eye is someone who has his or her eye focused on treasure in heaven and lives for that treasure. That focus has changed this person's life to where they value their treasure in heaven far more than any other earthly treasure. The clear-eyed person is the one who knows that a right relationship with God is far more important than any other relationship, or job, or wealth, or even the political situation in the world around us. The person with *"clear"* eyes knows what is truly important, and their identity is anchored in heaven, not in so many temporary earthly distractions. The eyes, then, are somewhat parallel to the heart in last week's passage, *"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* Today, we're looking at our focus in life. Those with *"clear"* eyes are focused on what is spiritually important.

On the other hand, Jesus also says (in verse 23), *"But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness."* Just as physical blindness causes someone to live in darkness, so also spiritual blindness leads to moral darkness. When we focus only on earthly treasures, it makes us mean and unloving people. Our whole lives are dark and meaningless, and *"...how great is that darkness,"* Jesus says. When we focus only on earthly possessions, all of life is out of whack, and we end up spiritually and morally blind.

And one real danger of going blind is that we may not know we're going blind! Most of us with glasses can remember the very first time we stepped outside with those new glasses on. The trees have leaves! I've heard so many people mention this. I was in 5th or 6th grade and stepped out side and realized that trees have individual leaves. Before, I suppose trees must have looked like giant green blobs, but those new glasses let me see that trees have leaves. And I mention this to illustrate that I never knew how bad my vision had been until I could see clearly. Without scripture to clarify, we may never know how blind we really are. Many people go through life focused only on what is temporary, but they never figure it out until it's too late. But Jesus reminds us here to focus on treasure in heaven. Value what is truly valuable. Otherwise, we end up in darkness.

And bad things happen in darkness. A year or two ago, I was trail running out at Blue Mound State Park, and it was dark – either at night or very early in the morning – and I was running up and down stairs, and dodging roots, and rocks, and suddenly, my headlamp stopped working. I skidded to a stop in total darkness and had to take that light apart and put it back together, but something had come loose in there. I fixed it, and got back to running, but it can be a terrifying thing to be surrounded by darkness. And if the darkness is spiritual, ***“how great is that darkness,”*** Jesus says. When we are focused on stuff, we are living in darkness. This is the first comparison.

II. The second comparison comes in verse 24, where Jesus now pictures this dilemma as the CHOICE BETWEEN TWO MASTERS.

So, he's making another comparison, and this time, he presents it as a choice. And let's notice: He doesn't just say we “SHOULDN'T” serve both God and money. He doesn't say we “MUST NOT” serve God and money. But he says, ***“No one CAN serve two masters.”*** It is impossible.

To serve a master is to serve that master exclusively. He's not condoning slavery, but he's using it to illustrate the point here. The master-servant relationship is rather unique and requires that a person be completely dedicated to doing what another person wants us to do. Today, we can work at McDonald's and Burger King at the same time (as long as we get the schedules worked out). We can cheer for two teams. You can simultaneously cheer for both the Packers and the Jaguars today if you would like to do that. We can have two friends. We can own both a Toyota and a Subaru (although we all know that Subaru is better). We can invest in both Apple and Microsoft. But we can only serve one master. As Paul will go on to ask in Romans 6:16, ***“Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?”*** And then he continues, ***“But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”*** We can serve God or we can serve sin, but we cannot serve both at the same time.

Conclusion:

So what? What does all of this mean for us? Here we are, nearly 2000 years later on the other side of the world in a completely different culture. What does this mean for us? I'd like to close with a series of four questions, to try to encourage us to think about what Jesus has said here.

First of all, I would just ask: What do we think about all day? Obviously, work is up there for most of us. Maybe we think about our kids and those we love. But what's going through our minds when we have a moment to slow down a bit? And related to this: What do we talk about? It's a bit like last week, where we asked: What do the people who know us best think is most important to us? Sometimes, others can see in us what we

cannot see in ourselves? So, what do we think about all day? If it's "stuff" or "money" or the next "thing" we think we need to buy, that's a bit of a red flag here. I have a thing for checking Facebook Marketplace right now. There are a few things on my mental shopping list, and if I have a moment, I will search real quick. That's a concern. Years ago, we studied 1 Timothy 4 and how a preacher needs to be spending his time, and one of our young adults charted how she thought I was spending my time back then. I was so busted! For those who don't know, UW SWAP is where the UW gets rid of their surplus equipment – desks, and chairs, and lab equipment, and all kinds of weird stuff. The public sales every Friday ended with COVID, but I do still check online every few weeks. But thinking about stuff like this can be an unhealthy obsession. So, let's ask: What do we think about all day? Am I satisfied with life, or am I always thinking about what I do not have?

Secondly, let's also ask: What is my attitude toward money? Money is deceptive. Money is tricky. We need it to live. We need it to provide food, and clothing, and shelter, but money (and a concern about money) has a way of taking over, where we obsess over it. Maybe we're worried about it. Maybe we're constantly thinking of how we can make more of it. Maybe we're concerned about how we'll be paying the rent in a few days. There's a danger is that we fix our eyes on riches instead of fixing our eyes on Jesus. And I think that's what Jesus is warning about here in Matthew 6. We are not to love the treasures of this life, but we are to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven instead. As Paul will go on to warn in 1 Timothy 6:10, *"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."* Money itself is not evil, but we have to guard against falling in love with it. We are not to obsess over it.

And speaking of money, I think there's also a value to asking: How do we actually spend our money? We just barely touched on this last week, but the credit union app doesn't lie, does it? A few years ago, we had an unauthorized charge on a debit card, so we had to put a fraud alert on our accounts, and somewhere in that process, our credit union suggested setting up a notification for every transaction. That's what we did, and now, every time I tap or swipe my card somewhere, my phone vibrates. I swipe for breakfast down at the Firefly in Oregon, and my phone dings. I fill up with gas, and my phone dings. I check out at Home Depot, and my phone dings. My phone dings at 2 o'clock in the morning, yep, that's Netflix taking their \$8 out of our account, and so on. I'm suggesting that there's a value in reading this passage from Matthew and then scrolling through a few weeks of transactions and asking: Do these transactions reflect the truth that I am laying up treasures in heaven? How am I spending my money?

And finally, I would suggest asking: How has my spiritual life been this week? By the way, almost nobody ever asks this of the preacher. Years ago, though, one of the men of the congregation pulled me aside and asked, "How are you doing spiritually?" Nobody had ever asked me that before! That was Clint, by the way, who now serves as one of the shepherds of the church down in Franklin, Tennessee. Even back then, he had the heart of a shepherd. But the question is: How has my spiritual life been this week? Have I spent time in prayer and study? Have I denied myself, and have I taken up my cross daily to follow Jesus? And if I haven't spent time in prayer and study, why is that? What was it that snuck into my life to keep me from spending time in the word and time in prayer? And what do I have to rearrange this coming week to make it happen? Can I set an alarm? Can I ask someone to hold me accountable? What was so important in my life last week that kept me from putting God first? How has my spiritual life been doing, and does God really come first in my life?

Next week, we hope to continue with the next paragraph, where we come to the realization that constantly pursuing the treasures of this earth can be emotionally exhausting.

For now, though, let's go to God in prayer:

Our Father in Heaven,

Thank you for your word and for this text that explains how important it is for us to stay focused on you. We want to serve you and you alone. Nothing else in this life is worthy of our worship. Your steadfast love never ends, and you are all we need. Father, we ask for your help as we stay focused on what is truly important this week. We live in a world full of distractions, and we need your help to transform us into being the kind of people you want us to be

We ask this in Jesus' name. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: furlakeschurch@gmail.com