



Soul Desires

Matthew 6:22-24

GraceLife: September 29, 2007

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Take your Bibles and turn back with us to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6. I have given up something in the midst of my study in the Sermon on the Mount – I have given up saying that the passage that I last studied must have been the most searching of them all, because it seems that with every new passage that we come to in the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord just digs deeper and deeper and examines and probes deeper and deeper – all for the sake of building us up.

I want to preface what I say today that the soul-searching nature of the Sermon on the Mount is for your good. It is designed to cleanse you, to purify you, to give you a single-minded devotion to Christ and leave you with the sense that that is not only the option, but that is the only desirable option.

Last time when we looked at verses 19-21, Jesus made it obvious for us and laid it out plainly that for us to live for heavenly treasures, to make the fundamental things of the kingdom of God the primary and sole motive of your heart, is in your self-interest, because He says in verse 19, you can live for these things on earth, but if you do, you are going to lose them. Heavenly treasures – the reward that God gives for simple obedience to Him is a treasure that you will never lose.

And so He exhorts you in that direction, He commands you in that direction, saying in verse 21, “For where your treasure is, there also will be your heart.” And it is the sense that where you put your affections is what is going to pull your heart in that direction. If you love earthly things – you love pride or you love money or you love whatever those things are – your heart is going to be pulled in that direction, and ultimately you are going to waste your life in an ultimate sense. But when your desire and the core love of your heart is heavenly treasures, the things of the kingdom of God, then your heart is going to be pulled in that direction and your actions will follow.

So Jesus commands us not to store up treasures for ourselves on earth. He says your heart priorities must be devoted to the things of His kingdom. And as we consider what He says, we realize that not only is it His prerogative to command that, but it is in our interest – He designs to bless us.

So we stand amazed at the authority of the Son of God who would stand and look at you today through His word and say, “It is My prerogative to command what your priorities

are.” It is a stunning expression of authority; it is not just what you do, it is who you are, what you are to be – Jesus commands that.

As we come to our passage this morning, Jesus is continuing in that theme. He is continuing to address your heart at its most fundamental level – the things that you love, the things that you serve, the things that you are devoted to. There is a common theme in this passage of verses 19-24, and it is about your soul desires, what you treasure, what you are devoted to, who it is that you serve at the most foundational level. We are going to see that as we look at verses 22-24 together this morning.

So look at verse 22 with me. I will read this passage and then we will consider it this morning. Jesus said:

The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 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!

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.

As we start this morning, let me give you just a very simple, one-sentence summary of everything that Jesus is saying here, because I like to have that overarching theme in mind as we go through the rest of the passage so that we don't miss the forest for the trees, as it were. This is what you need to keep in mind throughout this morning's message as you consider what Jesus is teaching today; it comes down to one simple sentence or summary and it is this: You – speaking in the singular, not collectively, but Jesus is speaking singularly here to you – you must serve God with an exclusive devotion or you cannot serve Him at all – very stark contrast that Jesus paints for us here. *You must serve God with an exclusive devotion or you cannot serve Him at all.*

Now Jesus is using a couple of metaphors here in this passage. They are a little bit difficult – at least the first one is. And the difficulty shows up in the fact that commentators interpret especially these two verses differently. Some commentators – looking at verses 22 and 23 where Jesus said,

The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

Looking at that passage, some commentators, who are very gifted men of God and have served the church very well over the decades – some commentators believe that Jesus' main point in those verses that I just read to you is that you should be generous with your wealth and not selfish. They point out, and rightly so, that sometimes the word that is translated in the New American Standard as “clear” – “the eye is clear” – they say that word is sometimes translated “generous” or “generously.” They will point to a verse like James 1:5 – “God gives to all men generously and without reproach” – in support of that.

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And they rightly point out that an evil eye can refer to a man who has a selfish preoccupation with money – he is niggardly, he is selfish, he is grasping. And so they look at that and say Jesus is commanding you to have a generous eye, a generous approach to your wealth and not to be selfish with it. And they go on even a little bit further – it is a pretty compelling argument at one level – where they say, “Look, He has just been talking about earthly treasure in verses 19-21; in verse 24 He talks about and concludes by saying you cannot serve God and wealth. What more do you need? He is telling you to be generous with your resources.” Everything that they say there is true.

And needless to say, it is a good thing, it would be a biblical teaching to say, yes, you should be generous with your wealth, with your money, with your resources, you shouldn't be selfish.

As I have studied this passage, let me tell you something, I have wished with all of my heart that those commentators were right, because if they were right, this passage would be a whole lot easier to process in my heart. But in my judgment, these good Bible teachers are mistaken here. Beloved, if Jesus was only teaching you to be generous, the implications of this passage would not be too difficult. I could deal with it pretty easily: When I am at the restaurant, I pick up the check. When I think about my giving to the church, I could write in, I could throw in another \$50 bucks, or whatever. I could pull out my wallet here and just start flinging out dollar bills all over the place to be generous and not to grasp after my wealth – and all the while in doing that, beloved, leaving the potential for other areas of sin, other areas of submission to the lordship of Christ, being left totally unaddressed and congratulating myself on my generosity while I am missing the point of what Jesus is saying.

You see beloved, while I respect these men and what they say about that principle is true, I think they have missed the main point of what Jesus is teaching in these five or six verses. It is about more than generosity, it is about more than your resources that you are looking at here that Jesus is talking about here. Jesus is saying, you must serve God with an exclusive devotion or you cannot serve Him at all – it is more fundamental than what you do with your money.

It is about an entire heart attitude, an entire mind attitude – it is about an entire comprehensive submission of your will to everything that God has said in His word, without questioning. You totally lay down arms as it were before God and say, “I surrender; the work is over. You are supreme; I am Your subject and I bow the knee.”

When you think of all the different areas of your life, your relationships, your work, your ministry, on and on down the line, your desires, your motives, and all of that, you realize that when Jesus is saying, “I am Lord over it all; you have to serve Me” and all of that stuff – listen, I found myself just totally deconstructed as I was studying this passage – this is totally compelling. Everything is on the table here today about your life. This is about the totality of your life, not just your finances, and it couldn't be any other way.

First of all, Jesus had already addressed the matter of giving earlier in chapter 6, verses 2-4. He dealt with giving there; there is no reason for Him to come back to that same theme in a different context.

But more fundamentally, we have said throughout this series on the Sermon on the Mount that Jesus is explaining the implications of true repentance. He is explaining what the repentant life looks like. And listen, genuine repentance, inspired by the work of the Holy Spirit in your heart – a genuine repentance that turns from sin and puts its faith in Christ alone for salvation, trusting in His shed blood, in His perfect righteousness as your grounds of acceptance before God – that kind of repentance gladly and willingly orients the totality of life around what Jesus Christ says. When He stands in unparalleled authority in the throne room of God, when He – through His Spirit-inspired word – when He comes to you as the person in control and in command of your life, the truly repentant heart says, “Yes, of course, You own me; You own me by right of creation, You own me by right of redemption. Without You, I would be doomed to an eternal destruction in hell, and You have saved me from that by Your wonderful grace, by Your wonderful love.”

Beloved, the moral compulsion of that is that your heart would be totally surrendered to this One who so graciously saved you when He could have judged you and you just bow before Him. You see, it is a submission to His person. A so-called faith that does not submit to Christ is no faith at all; it leaves that person still in his sins and on the road to eternal damnation in hell. You can’t say, “Jesus, I’ll take You as Savior, but I’m still going to be Lord here.” That’s ridiculous. You want to trust in the words of a guy like Zane Hodges over the words of Jesus, go for it, but I wouldn’t want to be banking my soul there. This is Jesus’ prerogative, and it is the only right response to Him.

And here is the point for this morning, beloved: this kind of submission that we are talking about is not abstract and academic. This isn’t a mental exercise that you go through and then you are done with it and you go on with your life. No. No, God has expressed His will pervasively for your life in the pages of scripture. When you read the scriptures from cover to cover, you see that there is nothing in your life that is unaddressed. The Bible says that you are even supposed to do such menial acts as eating and drinking to His glory – every breath devoted to Him.

And so we have to wrestle with the lordship of Christ in every area, not just the one area of finances, and I truly believe that’s what Jesus is talking about here this morning. He is saying, “You can’t have divided loyalties if you want to follow Me.” And I believe you will see that as we work our way through this text.

I have structured the message this morning around two very simple questions to help you respond to what Jesus says here. The first question is this, very simply:

1. How Do You See?

Let’s look at those first two verses again – verses 22-23:

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The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 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!

In the original language, that verse ends this way: “The darkness, how great!” And again, you are just left with that echo of the greatness of darkness if you don’t have the clear eye that Jesus is speaking about.

These are hard verses to understand when you first read through them. Let’s think about what Jesus is saying here. In a physical sense, speaking at a fairly simple observational level rather than a technical medical level, in a physical sense, the eye is that organ through which light enters into the body. You don’t see light with your elbow or with your ears or anything like that. The eye is that which lets light into the body. The eye is the organ that allows the entire body to see and find its way. And the eye must be clear and fixed on its object in order to bring clarity to the body’s direction – you have to be able to see clearly. That’s why I wear these glasses, because I can’t see faces in the first row without them.

Here in Matthew 6:22, Jesus is using the eye as a metaphor for your heart; He is using a picture. In the Old Testament in Psalm 119:18, the psalmist says, “My eyes are fixed on your commandments.” He is not talking about having his eyes glued to the text; he is talking about a heart that is devoted to the commandments of God. And Jesus is using the eye in a similar way here.

Remember from last time, He had just ended verse 21 by talking about your heart. Now He is picking up that same theme in the context here in verse 22, and He says: “The eye is the lamp of the body, so if your eye is clear...” what does that mean? The adjective “clear” here was used in the Greek Old Testament to mean singleness of purpose or undivided loyalty.

In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul uses the noun form of this adjective to tell the Corinthians that he did not want Satan to lead them away from “the simplicity and the purity of devotion to Christ.” It is not that following Christ is always simple in the sense that it is easy – if you have been a Christian for any length of time at all you know that. We go through trials and we go through struggles and times where we don’t understand, times where we are not always obedient as we should be. It is not that it is simple in that sense; it is that it is undivided – it is single-minded. And so Jesus is using the contrast between a clear eye and a bad eye to teach a spiritual lesson about exclusive devotion to God.

Stay with me here – not that I think you won’t; you guys are wonderful listeners and you are appreciative, but somehow I just have to say that – listen to me. If you have ever scratched your eye or gotten dirt in it or something sprayed into it, and you rubbed your eyes and you just can’t get it out and it stings and it burns, you can understand Jesus’ illustration here as He talks about your heart. When that happens to your physical eyes, your vision is clouded – maybe you are seeing double, maybe everything is just fuzzy, and you just can’t sort anything out until you get that problem with your eyes

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straightened out. You can't move forward until you get that problem with your eyes fixed so that your vision can be clear again and that your body can follow the direction that your eyes take you into. What Jesus is saying here is that your heart has to be like that. He says you only have clear spiritual direction in your life when your heart is singularly devoted to God. Only when you are singularly and undividedly loyal to Him as the supreme affection in your life can you get anywhere spiritually.

Looking at the negative side of His example here in verse 23 – “If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness” – if someone is blind, they don't get light in. Jesus says in His continuing metaphor there – remember the whole context of the Sermon on the Mount – He is teaching about inner righteousness. And so it is obvious that this is what He is talking about if you take the whole context of the sermon into account.

What He is saying here is this – and this is where, beloved, this starts to get really, really searching because I would venture to say that for most of you, you are here because you have an articulated desire in your mind that you want to know God's word and you want to follow Him; that's what usually brings people to a place like this – but beloved, here is the challenge: If sinful desires, sinful habits, or the love for earthly things are active in your heart and you try to give some of your affection to those things rather than hold even the good things about this earth in subjection to your overall service to God – if sinful desires and sinful habits are something that you feed – then you are like a bad eye which blurs the vision so you really can't see anything.

Jesus says your eye must be single. Stated differently, dropping the metaphor, you can't follow Christ with unconfessed sin in your heart. You may think that you are; you may think, “Well, I've got this 90% area of my life over here where I'm being faithful to God, it's just that 10% thing – I mean, come on, 90% in high school was an ‘A’!” Jesus says, “No, it's 100% or zero. It's more than just pass/fail; it's undivided or you are not following at all.”

You see, tolerated sin in your life clouds the eye of your heart and keeps you from clear spiritual discernment. Your reason and your conscience must have a single master and that master must be Christ as He has expressed His will in His word. Otherwise, beloved, your entire approach to life is distorted. You may think you see, but you really don't. You are dwelling in self-deception at that point.

Let me make this practical. Here is how you can run a little diagnostic check on your life and see if you have a clear eye or an unclear eye. I'll start with negative examples with this general principle. Listen, this just lays it all there, this goes to everything in your heart: Beloved, if you find yourself justifying certain actions or attitudes in your life that your conscience is trying to convict you on, if you are fighting against your conscience on anything, you can be confident of one thing: you do not have the single eye that Jesus is talking about here.

Your loyalties are divided because on the one hand you have it in your mind, “Well, I respect the word of God and I think that's a good and right thing,” but on the other hand

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you are wanting to hang on to the sin that is in your life, even if it is just something that is in your heart – let alone something more outward like what you do with your computer at night.

If you find yourself reasoning – and I’ll give you three little examples here, not all of them applicable to everyone, but notice the line of reasoning, not the particular examples that I use here – “I’m sure God is okay with me dating this unbeliever; after all, it’s a witnessing opportunity.” Second example: “You know, God wouldn’t have me confess anything to my spouse over this little argument we had; I’d lose face – I know God wouldn’t want that; God respects a man!” Third example: “You know, God understands why I never give any money to His kingdom; I mean, I have my needs, you know. Times are tight; God understands.”

Beloved, in those situations and a thousand more just like them, you are deceiving yourself into thinking that you are acting righteously when in fact you are behaving sinfully. And the worse part about that kind of reasoning process is – this is a grotesque sin; it sickens me even to expound it – when you are doing that in your life, here is what you are doing: You are calling God as a witness to justify your sin. The very articulation of what I just said makes me nauseous – that is disgusting! Who do you think you are to involve God as the justifier of your sin when you reason that way? You would be better off just being honest and saying, “I don’t care what God thinks; this is what I want to do.” At least then you are not multiplying your sin by impugning His character with your rebellion.

See beloved, that’s what happens when you have a divided heart – when you have it in your mind that “I want to love God and at least pay lip service to Him, but I also want my areas of sin that I can have as well.” That’s where it leads you: your vision is all messed up; your eye is bad. Dropping the metaphor, your heart is bad in those circumstances. You don’t see spiritual reality at all.

And so when Jesus says that “the light that is in you is darkness and how great is the darkness...” – when you start to mix up sin and a quasi-devotion to God like that, you are making it five times worse – no, it’s five thousand times worse; take a bigger number – because you’ve separated yourself from the convicting work of God as long as you are maintaining that attitude. And so you start to think God is someone other than He is, you think God evaluates His life differently than He really does, simply for the sake of your loyalty to your sin – that’s not good; that’s a dangerous place to be. You cannot simultaneously cherish sin and at the same time have spiritual clarity in your life.

Listen, if you came here with your conscience telling you, “That’s sinful!” – your conscience is probably right. And if that is the way you came in, you should immediately – based on the words of Jesus here – say, “As long as I’m holding on to that, I’m not seeing spiritual things correctly.” Don’t deceive yourself. If you have got dirt in your eye, you can’t see. If you have got dirt in your heart, you are not perceiving spiritual reality. That’s the point of Jesus’ metaphor here, “If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.” A bad eye can’t lead the body properly and a divided heart

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cannot lead your spiritual life. Let me say that again. A divided heart cannot lead your spiritual life – it just makes it worse.

When you try to play that game, beloved, the reality is you are doomed to confusion, uncertainty, and sin. God won't tolerate a rival in your heart. He is either uncontested Lord or you are in sin. You can't give Him 90%.

And beloved, let me say this: A lifestyle pattern that goes on month after month, year after year, of that kind of self-justifying divided heart that we have been talking about here – that almost certainly indicates that you are not a Christian, because a true Christian who truly recognizes the work of Christ on his behalf loves Him and obeys Him – the whole idea is just unthinkable to a true Christian that “I would allow that.” You say, “I'll slip into it from time to time, but I hate it when it's like that and I get out of it as soon as I see it” – okay, that's the idea. But embracing and tolerating that – no, Jesus says absolutely not. And so, in a room of this size, there are a lot of you that have some business to do.

Now, here is a simple thing that I found helpful in this area, in this regard, in this whole approach: When I find myself starting to justify actions in my life or attitudes in my life, and my conscience is saying something different and saying, “Ah, it's not that bad... yes, it is...” – you should see me driving on Vasquez Canyon sometimes; I'm all over the place! – here is a simple thing that I have universally found helpful to get my bearings in times like that. As soon as you recognize yourself starting to reason that way in your heart – you are going back and forth over an issue of righteousness – here is the first thing that I think you should do: You should immediately – as soon as you see that – you should immediately reaffirm your unconditional submission to God and His word and pray words to the effect of this: “God, whatever is going on in this issue, whatever You want is what I will do.”

And you clarify in your heart in a decisive way: “What God says here, even if I don't quite get it at the moment, whatever God says is what I'm going to do. I'm going to respond to whatever His word says and I'm going to respond as quickly as I possibly can.” So you affirm that principle of submission; you affirm that principle of undivided loyalty that says, “Whatever the cost, I'm Yours.” And you make your eye clear first of all by returning to exclusive devotion without trying to calculate, “What does God really say about... Where is that going to...?” Forget that. When you start thinking that way, you are still going with divided loyalty as you are trying to decide whether it's worth it to you or not – it can't be that way. That's the first step: “Lord, whatever You say, whatever You want, that's what I'm going to do; my heart is in utter submission to You.”

Once you've got your eye cleared out, then you can go to His word for direction – go to the scriptures and take immediate action on your heart commitment. Don't postpone your obedience, act on it.

Let me go back to those examples that I gave you: Somebody dating an unbeliever – the Bible says, although this is a secondary application of the verse, the Bible says, “Don't be

unequally yoked with unbelievers.” The undivided heart says, “God, I’m breaking off that relationship today.” Unresolved dispute with your spouse – men, the Bible says, “Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way and don’t be embittered against them.” Your response is, “God, I’m dialing the phone right now; I want to take care of it right now.” Not supporting the church at all – the Bible says, “God loves a cheerful and generous giver.” Your response is, “God, I’m going to get the checkbook right now; it’s in the top left hand drawer of my desk.”

You don’t postpone your obedience. When these issues are clear in your mind, you act upon them. The more you postpone and say, “I’ll get to it next week; things are really busy right now” – the more you postpone it, the more you are prolonging that divided heart and giving sin greater time to reach its root down into your soul. Is that what you want as a believer in Christ? God forbid! So what Jesus is teaching us here drives us to deal with sin swiftly and mercilessly, tolerating no corner for it in your life whatsoever.

So beloved, I will come back to the question: How do you see? What are you seeing? Are there divided loyalties in your heart, or do you see spiritual things clearly in your life?

Let’s approach it from a different perspective. If you find yourself going through life month after month, year after year, and you find that you are consistently in a state of confusion and uncertainty about spiritual things, one of the things that you need to ask yourself and deal with is the possibility that you have divided loyalties in your heart that are keeping you from understanding. Psalm 66:18 says:

If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear.

In a similar way, if you regard sin in your heart, spiritual things are going to be dark to you. So you consistently confront your divided desires with scripture and act in obedience. Over time as you consistently do that, you start to train your heart more and more in undivided loyalty to Christ. And the more you move in this direction, the more that you make that the standard to which you hold your heart accountable, the easier it gets, because when sin or some kind of divided loyalty approaches you and insinuates itself to your mind, you say, “There is no point going this rout; I know where it comes out so I don’t even want to get on the detour that takes me over the bumpy road.” And that singular devotion, that singular love for Christ, protects you from sin when you are committed to keeping your heart clear with a short leash on sin.

And you can see that reinforced as you go on to verse 24 and address the second question for today – similar issue, just expressing it with a different metaphor as Jesus did in verse 24 – the question is this:

2. Whom Do You Serve?

Look at verse 24 with me; Jesus said:

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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.

Jesus here uses the metaphor of first-century slavery to illustrate the same truth about your need for exclusive devotion to God. The word translated “serve” is the verbal form of the Greek noun that means “slave.”

In the first century, a slave was the property of his master and owed him exclusive service and loyalty. Don’t try to inject the idea of somebody working two jobs in the twenty-first century into this passage – that’s not what Jesus is talking about here. He is talking about an institution in which a slave could not be exclusively devoted to one master and simultaneously exclusively devoted to another master – it was contrary to the nature of slavery. Slaves had one master and to that master they owed everything; all of their devotion, all of their service, went to him.

Get this, beloved, Jesus is saying this – and He is speaking predominantly to Christians here, people who are in the kingdom; people on the outside of the kingdom can hear and maybe the Spirit of God will work in their hearts, but Jesus is speaking to those who belong to Him, who belong to the kingdom of God – and He says to them: God claims an exclusive devotion from you. The very nature of being a Christian, the very nature of being in the kingdom of God, being a citizen of God under the reign of the King – the very nature of that is such that nothing is allowed to compete with your service and obedience to Him – everything else is secondary.

What you want is secondary, and you train your desires so that they are consistent with what God wants. It goes back to that prayer, “God, whatever You want – that’s what I want. Whatever You want, that’s what I’ll do.” You die to your self-will – better yet, you kill it. It’s not so passive as death might suggest – you go out and kill it, with conscious intention of slaying everything in your heart that would rise up and compete for your affections that belong exclusively to Christ. That’s why Jesus says here, “You cannot serve God and wealth.” You can’t have two masters – you can’t! Jesus says, “Either you will hate one and love the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other.”

Let me help you think through that a little bit with some cross-references to other scriptures. You don’t have to – and I don’t think you should – understand those words in the intense, absolute sense that we usually think about the word “hate.” When “hate” is used side by side with the word “love” in scriptures, it is often used in a comparative sense, so that the hatred carries a sense of indifference or relative disregard for one thing in comparison with another.

Stick with me on this, because this gets really searching. Again, it would be easier if Jesus was talking about an open, violent hatred – that would be easier. Turn to the book of Luke, chapter 14, for a moment, where you can see this idea of using love and hate in a comparative sense. Luke 14:26 – Jesus said to the crowd:

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If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.

Now, there have been some fringe cults that have taken that to an extreme and required people to leave their families and cut off all communication with them. But that is obviously wrong – there is a reason why we call people like that “cults.” Jesus here is not telling you to break the fifth commandment about honoring your father and mother. He came to fulfill the law, not abrogate it. What He is saying here is that “in comparison to your love for Me, everything else is secondary. The closest relationships in your life take second place to the devotion that you must reserve exclusively for Me, or you cannot be My disciple.”

Beloved, do you love Christ like that? I mean, honestly, let’s just be real because we are talking about pretty important stuff here. Is Christ supreme in your affections or not? There is no middle ground. He does not permit you to put Him on the fireplace mantel alongside everybody else – that would be ridiculous if He did. I am glad He doesn’t, because even my earthly parents and my earthly family that I enjoy so much right now – they’re not God! They didn’t die for my soul. And so, by order of creation and by order of redemption, I do not give to God a love that is similar to them. There is a love and devotion to Jesus Christ that should be uniquely centered in your heart that no one else lays claim to. And if you don’t see that and you don’t embrace that, beloved, Jesus says, “You are not My disciple.”

Now with that in mind – and just to help you see this comparison a little more as we compare scripture with scripture in a hopefully helpful way – turn back to the book of Matthew, chapter 10, beginning in verse 37. This is the flip side of what we just read in Luke 14. It is expressing the same principle and helps you see the comparative nature of it. Jesus says:

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Here is why that is important, beloved; this is why it is so searching. When you understand what Jesus is saying here in Matthew 6 about loving one and hating the other in a comparative sense, you realize that Jesus is addressing a more subtle danger in Matthew 6:24 and the standard is actually *higher*.

Because you see, not everyone who loves money is marked by a constant external, expressive, vitriolic hatred toward God so that they spew venom at the mere mention of His name. No, the problem is more subtle. When you have divided loyalty, Jesus says that may manifest itself in just indifference to God. Indifference to God is hatred in comparison to your love of your earthly pursuits. You prefer something more than God, you love that – you hate God by comparison. The absolute nature of His holiness and His

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character commands absolute loyalty. If you try to mix the two, it is lethal to your spiritual life.

And here is what I want you to see: You are not off the hook if you can honestly say, “Well, I don’t hate God intensely; then I must be okay.” That’s not it at all – that’s not the standard. The standard that Jesus has established is the first and foremost commandment of whether you love God with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind, all of your strength – all of it! Don’t try to justify yourself with this lesser, partial stuff. You are either all in or you are out of the game.

So beloved, I ask the question again: Whom do you serve? That manifests itself with every decision you face, with every temptation you encounter, with every dispute within your family. Your fundamental loyalties are exposed – they are laid bare for you to see clearly because a fundamental undivided loyalty to God says, “I will respond to those things righteously. I will trust Him in trials; I will obey Him in temptation; I will be a peacemaker.” But when you carve out areas of your life where sin is acceptable and you just refuse to repent, where you deceive yourself and say, “I’ll serve sin in this area and I’ll walk with God everywhere else” – God says, no, it doesn’t work that way. You cannot have divided loyalties; you can’t have two masters; you have to choose.

Beloved, that stark reality that Jesus is talking about here – probably for every one of us to one degree or another, depending on your level of spiritual sensitivity – the stark reality of that – and as you think through the course of your life and even what you were like last week – that stark reality exposes the profound uncleanness that is in you, talking even to you as a believer in Christ. Because as you contemplate this, you become conscious of how flippantly you choose your own ways over what Christ requires, even though Jesus plainly said you cannot serve two masters.

And if you are thinking about this rightly in the reality of the remaining sin that is still in your heart, you should be saying something like this – you should be saying to yourself, “This means that my guilt is very great!” Yes, that’s the point. You profoundly need the forgiveness of sin, and how you respond to that conviction says volumes about your soul. There is a lot at stake here as you respond to what Jesus says this morning, beloved. If you ultimately blow off the demands of His lordship, you really are in serious spiritual danger – I would not want to be in your shoes. To you, beloved, I would say: be warned. Jesus demands exclusive devotion and obedience. Stop trifling with your sin and indifference. You are not as well off as you think you are.

But on the other hand, those of you that are tender-hearted and find yourselves grieving because you fall short – to you I would say: take heart. If you find yourself saying something like, “I am so bankrupt,” there is actually hope for you. Turn back to Matthew 5 – I am almost done here. Matthew 5, beginning in verse 3, where Jesus says:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

“Soul Desires”

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The whole Sermon on the Mount starts out with Jesus pronouncing blessing on those who are broken over their sin. He says that is a distinctive mark of the true citizen of heaven. You are blessed because that conviction drives you back to the cross which is your only hope. Christ died for your sins and that means that even this most fundamental sin of duplicity in your heart can be forgiven through His shed blood. But you have got to take it seriously.

1 John 1:9:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

To you, beloved, I would say, if your heart is broken over this, be encouraged. Jesus will certainly bless you when you seek Him in faith with a broken, undivided heart and give Him the exclusive devotion of which He is so preeminently worthy.

Let's pray:

Lord, grant us great grace that we might search our hearts, that You might expose areas where our loyalties have been divided. And grant us, Father, the repentance that would honor You in response. Lord Jesus, strip away everything else, Father – praying in the sense that Peter said, “Lord, You know all things – You know I love You.”

Father, even in the midst of seeing our compromised lives, from the bottom of our hearts, Lord, we cry out to You and say, “You are my exclusive Master; You are the object of my undivided loyalty. Help me to live out that which I embrace in my heart.” Help everyone in here to that end, our God.

We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

This transcript was prepared by Shari Main.