

Sermon Notes of Rev Dr Ivor J.W.Oakley (15-10-2000 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Matthew 6 v 22-24

Additional Reading Mark 10 v 17-30

God and Mammon

Introduction

In this section of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is dealing with treasures – not just money and possessions, but anything we set our hearts on, think of continually, live for. Treasures on earth include possessions, ambition, promotion, status, but these things do not last and do not satisfy. They have their place, but we must not over-value them. We are all going to die, and what use will they be then?

Treasure in heaven is most important of all. Concerning things about God and our relationship with him – our salvation, forgiveness, living in his will, blessing. These things last beyond time to eternity, they increase in value with the years. They last and endure and are therefore most important.

Our priority must be to get right perspective on life, and all will then fall into place. This life is only a stage on the journey to our goal. Man of the world is narrow-minded, because this life is just here and now, only for the present. The Christian has a new centre; his outlook is changed for there is an eternal dimension to his life. He values all things in the light of his relationship with God and eternity.

Now the Lord has not finished with this theme. He knows the weaknesses of human nature and our temptations. Jesus emphasises need for God to hold supreme place in life. His warnings are as important for us as believers as for non-Christians. God takes supreme place at conversion, but that position has to be maintained as the years go by. The act must become the attitude. This is something which we cannot take for granted. Too many have begun well but fail to keep the Lord in supreme place, allegiance becomes divided, end up scarcely recognisable as Christians.

The Lord's warnings are repeated in the rest of the New Testament. Not go far in Christian circles without meeting people who are not where they used to be. Perhaps we have known better days spiritually.

*“Where is the blessedness I knew
When first I saw the Lord”*

Many causes – one is materialism, overprizing things of this life and taking eyes off the Lord. Worldliness, the desire to indulge, possess and impress, is eating the heart out of many a church. There are church members who still have the Lord in their lives, who pray, give, attend, serve, but do not have the Lord in supreme place. They are “involved, but not committed”. So hear the Lord's warnings about this.

But first he lays down a general principle. We need to have a clear vision, good spiritual eyesight and single-mindedness. Then he shows that if our spiritual sight gets blurred, material things will overtake our lives, and allegiance to the Lord will falter.

Need for clear spiritual eyesight

The eye is the lamp of the body (Matthew 6:22). If the eyes are good, i.e. clear unblurred eyesight, then the whole body is full of light. But if our vision is defective, blurred, not crystal clear, the whole body will be full of darkness and how great it will be. Everything our body does depends on our ability to see – we need to see to run, jump, drive a car, cross the road, cook, paint, garden. That small intricate and precious organ, the eye, is the secret of our being able to live, work, travel. Eyesight has to be good if we are to function properly (Hence the need for glasses to correct defects and enable us to live and work properly).

So if to live Christian life properly, the first thing we need is clear eyesight. If that is defective, things will soon go wrong. It all depends on our spiritual eyesight – another way of speaking about the heart, our inner life. In the Bible, to “fix your eye” and “set your heart”, are the same thing. Spiritual eye is sound when the heart is in the right place. The Bible repeatedly emphasises the heart, and the central place which the Lord must have in the heart. **Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life** (Proverbs 4:23). **Seek him with all [your] heart** (Psalm 119:2). **Doing the will of God from your heart** (Ephesians 6:6).

In other words, the Bible is saying the eyesight has to be good. Clear vision. Christ to fill whole picture. Must be Lord in the heart. This is the crucial issue – who fills our spiritual sight? Who rules the heart? What is my dominant ambition? Who is on the throne? The answer to these questions will determine and control whole life just as physical sight controls movements and activity of the body. The secret of spiritual prosperity begins when the Lord, his will, his glory, his plans and purposes dominate and rule. There has got to be complete singleness of purpose. Not I running my life and praying the Lord will help me do it and help me get what I want. Instead, Christ must be enthroned in the heart. Then life has clear direction and is filled with purpose and drive. It is precisely here that we have the reason for mistakes and failures in the Christian life. People can blame this person and that situation for lack of spiritual life and progress, but the real reason is their vision is obscured and there are too many rivals claiming the throne of the heart.

J.C.Ryle, speaking on these verses, said “There are thousands in our churches who are uncomfortable, ill at ease, dissatisfied with themselves, but they hardly know why. The reason is found in this verse. They are trying to keep in with both sides. Endeavouring to please God and man, serve Christ and the world at the same time. Do not make this mistake. Let us be decided, thoroughgoing, uncompromising followers of Christ. Let us have Paul’s motto **One thing I do** (Philippians 3:13). Then we shall be happy Christians. Heart, head and conscience will be full of light. This is the secret of happiness in spiritual things. Be decided for Christ and your whole body will be full of light.”

So the Lord lays down general principle. Have clear spiritual vision. Make sure the heart is right with God. Make sure Christ is central in the picture, and that he fills our vision and is enthroned in our hearts.

Then the Lord goes on to deal with one thing which can obscure vision, rival the Lord’s place, challenge his supremacy. And points out spiritual disaster this leads to.

It is only one of many things, but a very common one and doing enormous damage in the Christian church today. The problem is concentration on earthly treasure, Mammon, i.e. materialism.

You cannot serve two masters

You cannot serve God and Mammon – or money, or material possessions (Matthew 6:24). Here is one of the great rivals for supremacy in the Christian's heart – and one of the things which can quickly blur the spiritual vision. Some disagree with Jesus. They think it is not right to have to face such a stark and outright choice. They claim it is possible to serve two masters at the same time. They serve God on Sundays, and Mammon – pursuit of wealth – on weekdays. Some serve God with their lips, and Mammon with their hearts. Or serve God with half their being, and Mammon with the other half of their being.

Jesus says this is an impossible compromise. The Greek word used for “serve” is δουλεύειν and means “be enslaved to”. Can only be enslaved to one master at a time. Can work for two employers at different times of the day, but cannot be the property of two owners. Slavery means no rights. The slave belongs to the master 24 hours a day, and is entirely at his disposal. God requires total entire and exclusive devotion. And if some of our devotion is given to Mammon, we have abandoned exclusive devotion to God. Hudson Taylor said “If Christ is not Lord of all, he is not Lord at all”. The Christian owes total, exclusive loyalty to the Lord.

Yet materialism and money and possessions also seek to bring us under its spell, and we are never free from the temptation, especially in these days of affluence, the rat race, and amidst the culture and outlook of people all around us. Yet these things have always been a threat to the Christian. **The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things** (Mark 4:19) pictures in the parable of the sower. **Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me** (2 Timothy 4:10).

How sad it is that with some Christians, when money gets tight, giving to the Lord is the first thing they cut back on. Sad to observe the subtle change in some Christian's lives when they prosper. Sad, also, to hear of Christian parents who discourage their children from going into ministry and mission field because there's no money in it, it is a waste of their education, why not get a “good job” and still serve God in the local church?

Recent series of articles in the Evangelical Times, well known figures interviewed about their background, conversion, favourite hymn, book they found most helpful, comparing churches of youth with churches of present day. The conclusion of many of those interviewed was that though we are better taught nowadays (because of Christian books and expository teaching), there is less self sacrifice nowadays, less emphasis on separation from the world, less concern to witness and evangelize. Could this have anything to do with our affluence, concern for status and position? Heads are filled with more information and intellectual understanding, but not the commitment and consecration. More compromises. Not so decided in our discipleship. Not know what it is to be enslaved and totally given up to God. Trying to have best of both worlds. Not as detached from the world as our forefathers. Forgotten that we are pilgrims and strangers.

So, many things seek to bring us into subjection, to dominate our minds and win our hearts. Jesus warns us that if materialism is transcendent, it will affect our whole lives – our prayer life, our commitment, lose vision, dampen zeal, distort outlook, reduce enthusiasm, direction of life, and value to church. Material things are a poor second best. They will never satisfy. They pall and lose their attraction. Can get grip on us without our realizing. Bound to suffer loss at judgement seat and reward will be less than otherwise. What regrets, even for a Christian, especially a worldly one.

Jesus reminding us yet again of God's claims. Total undivided allegiance. Undisputed authority. He has entrusted us with money, good salary, nice house, and possessions. Thank him – but do not lose head, do not live for them, boast of them, put trust in them, do not let them come between you and God, and spoil your testimony, steal your heart, enslave you, so that you are no longer his slave. Happened to many believers before, and still happening now. One of great causes of spiritual weakness in the church at present. Sit lightly to material possessions; regard selves as stewards, not owners, totally at his disposal. Caretakers and custodians, and nothing more. Be careful of thinking you can handle many possessions and wealth. Many have thought that, but slowly and imperceptibly materialism has taken over their life. **If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall** (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Story of three men in a railway carriage compartment. Joined by a Christian man. Asked him to join in their card game and gamble for money. Christian replied, "I cannot, I have no hands." "What are those hanging at the end of your arms?" "They are not mine – they are Christ's".

Conclusion

Lord's plea for clear spiritual sight. Fix eye and set heart on the Lord, his will, his glory, his plans. They are to be our only concern. Beware of things which would seduce us from him. In this context he speaks of just one of them – materialism. The Christian must have clear spiritual sight because Jesus is Lord of his life. He is the Lord's bond-slave, and belongs entirely and unreservedly to him. It is an extreme step, to put oneself out entirely for the Lord. But consider the Lord's extreme step – how he put himself out for us. Florence Nightingale said "I am thirty years of age. Lord, let me think only of your will". At the end of her life, she was able to say "I kept back nothing from God". **You will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will** (Romans 12:2).