

Light & Darkness

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[0 : 00] So Luke chapter 11 verse 33. Jesus said, No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden or under a bowl.

Instead they put it on its stand so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light.

But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it then that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.

Amen. We thank God for his word to us this morning. No one sets up a video camera and then stands behind it.

No, he stands where you can see him. He points the camera at the subject. No one cooks a gourmet dinner and then leaves it to go cold on the plate while she decides to go and Hoover the bedroom instead.

[1 : 23] No one buys a lawnmower and then leaves it parked in the shed all summer long. No one sets up one, two, three, four, last count, 20 lights dotted around the study and then points them at the walls.

No, he points them at his face so that you can see him. Folks, with most things it is absolutely obvious how they are intended to be used. And if we fail to use them for that purpose or if we deliberately frustrate their purpose, then why bother having them at all?

Well, this is the first of the three points that Jesus makes very briefly in our passage this morning. Verse 33. No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden or under a bowl.

Instead, they put it on its stand so that those who come in may see the light. It's obvious, isn't it? It is stupid to light a lamp and then put it in a place where it won't offer any light to the members of the household.

The cellar doesn't need to see itself. We put the light where it will do some good. But of course, Jesus isn't here offering advice on frugal living.

[2 : 29] He's not giving ammunition to exasperated parents whose children keep leaving every light in the house switched on. Remember, folks, we saw last week, didn't we?

We saw that the question of this little section of Luke's gospel is how will you respond to Jesus? Will you stand condemned by the men of Nineveh at the judgment because you failed to listen to the one greater than Jonah?

Or will you be among the blessed of verse 28 who hear the word of God and obey it? The question is, when you are handed the light of the gospel, what will you do with it?

It's as if Jesus stands there offering the truth to you, offering himself to you and challenging you, saying, will you ignore this light or will you make use of it?

When you hear this good news of the kingdom of God, are you going to file it in your head as an irrelevance? As maybe an interesting historical anecdote?

[3 : 38] As, well, worth knowing so that you can understand other people, but not for me, thanks very much. As a set of useful ideas, perhaps.

Ideals. Some good teaching to follow when it's convenient. Well, if any of those possibilities are your response, Jesus says, Jesus says that's about as useful as lighting a candle and sticking it under a bowl.

You may as well not have bothered. If your response to Jesus is going to be like that, then don't bother listening. It won't gain you anything. If you're going to use a lamp as intended, that means sticking it up high so it sheds light for the whole room.

If you're going to respond to Jesus as he intends, that means treating him not as an intellectual curiosity, but treating him as saviour and lord. It means, verse 28, hearing his words and obeying them. Jesus comes offering repentance after the model of Nineveh.

[4 : 46] He comes offering wisdom greater than Solomon. He comes calling you to respond. Do not neglect the light that Jesus offers you.

That, I think, is the primary challenge of verse 33. Fundamentally, how will we ourselves respond to this offer of light?

But there is more here, too, than that individual level response. Because notice that here in verse 33, when the lamp is placed on the stand, Jesus says that those who come in may see the light. See, here in this verse, the lighting and the placing on the stand, these are singular verbs. These are done by one person. But the intention, the purpose of those things is broader.

All who enter receive the benefit of the lamp. So we're saying the light of the gospel isn't a little torch for reading under the duvet and hoping your parents don't notice.

[5 : 48] It's not a little desk lamp for illuminating just the book that you're working on. No, it's a blazing beacon. It's the glittering chandelier that hangs in pride of place in the center of the room.

It's there for everyone. Friends, the Bible is consistent in this. Consistent in saying that selfishness in religion is profoundly wrong.

It is completely opposed to God's intentions for us. And yet, yet it is all too prevalent. I mean, God's intentions have always been that the good news would spread far and wide.

Back in the beginning when he made a covenant with Abraham, Abraham was told all the nations of the earth were going to be blessed through him. Folks, it is baffling, isn't it?

That today that we might claim to have believed the good news of the gospel. That we might say we have found for ourselves this pearl of great price.

[6 : 53] It's baffling that we might say this and yet not wish to see others join us. And wish it to such an extent that we exert ourselves to that end.

That we do something about that desire. Why do we not do that? Is it simple selfishness?

Is it as if we ourselves were going to be somehow diminished by being joined by others? That maybe there's not enough of God's love to go around? Folks, I assure you, God's love towards you is no more decreased by the presence of another beside you than the usefulness of the lamp is decreased by the presence of another in the room.

Or is it that there are those who actually we would rather weren't standing beside us on the last day? Those whom we think too great a sinner.

That it would spoil our enjoyment for them to be there. That the mere fact of their presence would ruin our experience.

[8 : 04] It's easy to think that, isn't it? It's easy to look even in the situations of our own lives, let alone through the pages of history, and see people who we think, I wouldn't want to spend eternity with him.

But I think when we think this, we are underestimating the depth of our own sins that we have been forgiven.

We underestimate the extent to which men and women are actually cleansed from sin. That the sins are washed away, wiped clean, such that we are not what we once were.

Or perhaps, perhaps it's that we're afraid. We're afraid that some harm might befall us if we're bold in our proclamation. This, I think, is what often causes me to hesitate.

It's relatively easy to be bold on the other side of a camera. I can't see any of you right now. I don't know how angry your faces are. And actually, even in a large room, for me at least, it's not so much standing talking to a large group that's hard.

[9 : 21] It's in the smaller group, one-to-one. There I'm much more cautious. Very reluctant to risk making you uncomfortable. I don't want to sit across the table knowing that I have angered or upset you.

I fear the results of boldness in that kind of a context. Now, folks, there is an extent to which fear of consequences for being bold with the gospel, there's an extent to which that fear is logical.

There might indeed be consequences for that kind of boldness. Folks, if the SNP passed their proposed hate crime bill, it is entirely conceivable that you and I could face prosecution for declaring that which the Bible clearly states.

It is understandable that we fear. And yet we have to ask ourselves, of what are we truly afraid? Why fear what might happen to us here and now, when we know with certainty what our final destination will be? What price is not worth paying now for the sake that some might come to Jesus, might find life?

[10 : 34] Will I really not risk my comfort for the sake of your eternal soul? Will you not risk your comfort for the sake of your friends, your family, the people you live alongside?

Will you not risk your comfort for the sake of your friends, your family, the people you live alongside?

This section, verse 34, picks up the image of the lamp again, but now makes a somewhat different point. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light.

But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. So here the point is that whether or not the eye is healthy, that that has an impact on the whole way that you act, on everything about how you live.

Think about how much it throws you off when there's a power cut. When we cannot see, whether because we have no light available to us, or because there's a problem with our eyes, when we cannot see anything, it makes a big difference.

[12 : 08] Even if it's not complete sightlessness. Damage to your eyes can have a big impact. Whether that's because you're not allowed to drive, because text is suddenly hard to read, or countless other struggles.

But of course there's actually two layers of metaphor here, aren't there? On the first level you have the eye pictured as a lamp. And this kind of presumes the ancient Greek view of sight as involving a flow of light out from the eye, to mingle with the eye of the light of the object that you're looking at, and then to return into the eye and into the body.

So that's the first level of metaphor, the eye is the lamp. But the second level, as in the first image in verse 33, Jesus' intent is deeper than the eye is a lamp, the second layer of metaphor uses the eye to represent not just seeing physical objects, but rather moral and spiritual truth.

So the point then is, moral and spiritual illumination is not an end in itself, but rather it casts its light over the whole of one's life.

So what we're saying is, that the objective, the purpose, the idea here, it is not to say, Aha! I see what should be done.

[13 : 34] That's not the point. The purpose is to actually go and do the thing, not just to see what should be the case. A sound understanding of right and wrong, Jesus says, will lead you to do that which is good.

Just as a healthy eye isn't beneficial in and of itself, but is beneficial because it enables you to live out your life. Conversely, a warped perception of the truth, that will produce even more catastrophic results than the unhealthy eye that cannot focus properly.

And off the back of that, therefore, verse 35 offers a direct challenge in response. See to it then, that the light within you is not darkness.

See folks, if honest self-examination, if looking at your situation with a dispassionate eye, a willingness to seriously consider, rather than to assume all is well, if honest self-examination causes you to realise all is not well, then do something about it.

See to it, says Jesus. Don't be content to live in darkness, because the true light that gives light to everyone has come into the world.

[15 : 03] And to those who receive him, those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God. The first step.

The first step to resolving the issue, the first part of making a change, the first step is to recognise that there is a problem. To look within and to say, is this lightness or darkness?

Is this healthy or unhealthy? Now, that brings us along to verse 36. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you. Now, this verse is not the easiest ever to understand, and not least, because at first sight, it sounds like something of a tautology, doesn't it? Like saying, if you stand up, you will be standing.

Well, obviously. But maybe at first it sounds redundant, but I think what's happening is that the verse is here to guard against a potential misunderstanding.

[16:12] See, when we talk about the light within you, we perhaps naturally incline to think of this light within as something that we have produced ourselves.

as an innate light, if you will. My own moral perception, my own ability to know what is right and wrong. But that isn't the sense in which Jesus is using the idea of the light within.

That's not what Jesus means. Now, verse 36 shows us that the body is only completely lighted when a lamp shines on it from the outside. Remember, the eye is the lamp of the body.

This light within is light that's come into the body from the outside. See, whilst the Bible does lead us to expect that our consciences will be gradually transformed according to the pattern of God's purposes, that we will increasingly find that it's uncomfortable to act contrary to his will.

Yes, we are to expect that to happen. But we are also told not to treat our own understanding, to treat our own conscience as our guide.

[17:24] The Bible is clear. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? You cannot trust your own heart.

Always let your conscience be your guide. That's Walt Disney's wisdom, not God's. Rather, we are to follow the example of the Apostle Paul and take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Take captive your thoughts, forcing them to be obedient to Christ. So then the question is, when we look at what's inside, is that what we see?

Do we see that our thoughts are full of light? When we look at our actions, do we see that they are in accordance with God's intentions or do they owe more to the directions in which our society, our friends, and our deceitful hearts are inclined to lead us?

Folks, if you look within and you see darkness, then see to it that it is replaced by light, urges Jesus.

[18:37] How? Well, by filling yourself with light, by turning to the one who said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

It is not a complex formula. It is not a series of steps to be mastered. No, the hope for light within is the one who is himself light, is Jesus himself.

So when we look at verses 34 through 36 together, what we see is that full illumination only comes when we're willing to receive light from the lamp of God's truth.

And those who've received this complete illumination, those who are lighted up inside, well, they won't be tempted to ask for a sign from heaven, as some in that crowd misguidedly did.

No, that complete illumination will be so transformative that they're going to be among those who hear the word of God and obey it, and who are therefore blessed.

[19:49] So folks, as Jesus offers you the lighted candle of the gospel, what will you do with it? Will you ignore it?

Or stick it in a dark back room where it makes no difference whatsoever? Or will you place it on a stand where everyone gets the benefit and allow it to shine into your life to transform every aspect of your being such that there is no longer any darkness at all?

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, lighten our darkness, we pray, where we are imperfectly transformed.

Shine your light into our hearts, we ask. Grant that we may not trust our own deceitful hearts, but rather the clear illumination of your word.

Grant that we may not be selfish with the light that we have found, that we have received from you, but rather that we might shine forth as beacons of light, of hope, of good news to be found in you.

[21:08] Lord Jesus, lighten our hearts, we ask. Amen.