

11. Looking

The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light.

Matthew 6:19-24

Treasures in sight

In verses 19 to 24 Jesus talks about the radical choice for the kingdom of heaven. At first glance there doesn't seem to be much cohesion in the section which speaks about storing up treasures (19-21), the significance of the eye (22-23), and the impossibility of serving two masters (24). Through changing images and via divergent approaches, however, we encounter the theme of the radical choice at the cross-roads. We stand between an earthly and a heavenly treasure, between an eye full of darkness and an eye full of light, between hating and loving. We have to take the right decision decisively and continuously.

A choice is determined by our appraisal of the things involved. Every person has his values. They may differ sharply according to age group, but various things always become priorities. They are "in," or "sought" or "preferred." At a certain stage of life some things are ignored, while they are desired at another stage. Some people cannot keep their eyes off of something while others remain totally uninterested. Young and old attempt to realize their goals and obtain what they judge to be important. In Jesus' time many poor dreamed of possessing a fortune one day. Wealthy and secure they would no longer be dependent upon the caprices of the rich and powerful. They would do anything to get their hands on a fortune. Wouldn't you be willing to live like a pauper if through that you were able to buy a plot of land which you knew contained a hidden treasure? Who wouldn't say farewell to family and friends in order to become rich in another country? Even today immigrants are leaving underdeveloped nations to gather what would be considered a "treasure" of money in their home countries.

Jesus now compares searching for treasure with searching for the kingdom of heaven. At first glance no one seems to profit very much from it: more likely, faith, brings poverty and persecu-

tion. At closer examination, however, the opposite appears to be the case. Earthly treasure corrodes and perishes through moths and rust. Its vulnerability remains as well: others can always take it away from us through whatever form of theft or coercion. This does not apply to the luxury and glory of the kingdom of heaven: these things are elevated above the wear and tear of mortality and the threat of theft.

Jesus' instruction does not stress the value of the kingdom of heaven, but rather the question of how much value *we* attach to it. Jesus says: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The heart is the real issue. We will not persevere on our earthly journey to the kingdom of heaven unless we are totally pervaded by the future which awaits us. Everything must be made subservient to a desire to obtain the fullness of life and holiness in God's kingdom. Prospectors are afflicted with gold fever. Travelers to God's kingdom ought to be homesick for heaven. We know that the treasures in sight are for real!

Respect for the master

Anyone dealing in inanimate objects, draws up a scale of values. Silver is fine, but gold is more precious. Better a good salary than the minimum wage. We compare the comparable. When the issue concerns treasure on earth versus treasure in heaven, however, we are quite incapable of drawing up a list of priorities. As if the former is worth a bit more than the latter. The only choice possible is a radical one, and why? Because here we are choosing for one master and against another. While you can love both gold and silver, you cannot serve two masters at the same time: "Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other." In this way we cannot "serve both God and Mammon."

Powers and masters stand behind the respective earthly and heavenly treasures. In the final analysis we will serve one or the other: God or Mammon. Mammon is a term applied to the idol of earthly possessions. Meaning possession, the word has been personalized to "Mammon." A power with a master in the background: the evil one or Satan. Aiming at our destruction, this ruler anonymously attempts to capture us with the gifts and possibilities of this world. In paradise the issue already concerned, so it seemed, not the services of Satan but a fruit worth eating

and it is still the case that the possibilities and attractions of this world, at first glance totally neutral, are used to keep people from coming back to God and the desire for lasting treasures. Anyone with interest in earthly treasure falls into a trap. Walking before God, in His commandments and towards the coming kingdom of heaven becomes very difficult. You can only serve one master at a time.

Choosing for God also means that we stand differently over and against the possibilities and treasures of this earth. They become subservient to our preference for heavenly treasures. We can only serve one God in this life. The difference between Mammon and God is that the former hides himself while God makes Himself known. We know where we will end up with Him!

The gleam in our eye

Wedged between the statements about earthly versus heavenly treasure and the two masters we can find a few words concerning human eyes. Verses 22 and 23 are related to the radical choice as well. Jesus speaks about good eyes and bad eyes. Once again a parting of the ways, and the word “good” specifically points to the “simplicity” of our eyes. The Greek word is not generally found in conjunction with eyes. Jesus chooses it in order to allude to the subject of the unmixed and undivided choice for heavenly treasure. Eyes which don’t look in two directions at once are appropriate for an unconditional choice: a single or good eye.

Jesus says: “The eye is the lamp of the body.” A surprising statement. But we often hear such things from Jesus’ mouth. Ordinarily we think of the eye as an organ which receives light, but not one that spreads it. Eyes have to catch light: they can’t give it away, can they? Nevertheless, Jesus is speaking here about gleaming eyes. They fill the whole body with light, while false eyes darken it.

Using these drastic expressions about the eye as a lamp, Jesus focuses our attention upon the crucial significance of our vision. First, the eyes look, and then the feet move. Our eyes focus our attention and our body follows. The Bible is full of examples of bad eyes which darkened the whole body. Eve looked with a false eye at the only fruit which God had denied to man. She saw the attractive fruit. When she followed her wrong looking, her whole body became darkened: shame crept up between peo-

ple and guilt overshadowed their birth and work. Michal, looked with a false eye at her husband, David, while he danced and jumped in front of the ark with the common people, and account of pride her life was made barren. Judas looked with a false eye when Mary expressed her love for the Savior with expensive perfume before His death, and the end came when he went and hung himself because he had betrayed innocent blood. Darkness is great when the eye is not good.

Our eyes have everything to do with looking forward to treasures in heaven and breaking with the service of Mammon on earth. Whenever our eyes are excited and stimulated by earthly riches, the body is carried away into the slavery of greed, or jealousy or lust or avarice. Those desiring to reach heaven had better be careful with their looking. The eye must be excited by the things of God and His future. When our eyes are uprightly trained on God, like the eyes of a slave girl trained to the hand of her mistress, our whole body will be enlightened to do all sorts of good works. Correct behavior begins with correct vision.

The visual man

According to many people man in the 20th Century is much more visually oriented than he was in earlier periods. The church should adjust itself accordingly. The era of preaching churches with listening services is past, and don't expect too much from traditional Bible reading. The future lies with seeing and with audio-visual communication. Whether or not man has always been a visually oriented creature is debatable. It could be the case that nothing has happened to our ears which somehow hear less, but that something has happened to our eyes and our seeing. Modern man looks a lot but sees little. His eyes have gone blind. Man refuses to have an eye for heaven, for God the Creator, for angels and devils, for a life after death and a last judgment. When the eye is bad because it refuses to look further than the visible horizon, life becomes darkened.

In this day and age it is good to learn that the eye is the lamp of our body. How we look and what we look at are of great importance. When our eyes are pure, we can look with joy at everything which is good and deserves praise: Seeing good examples teaches us to follow them. We will look with displeasure at those things which are worthless and speculate on the wrong attributes or feelings: we learn to have an aversion to evil. Cor-

rect vision keeps our life fresh while keeping a view of heavenly treasure open.

In this visually oriented era we have to learn that the eye is not a neutral receiving station, but a lamp for our body. This lamp must shine by aiming the eye at God, the only Master. An original motto we can hang on the book shelf or attach to the television is: "The lamp of the body is the eye. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light."