

Undivided Loyalty

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I invite you to turn to the Gospel of Matthew. We are studying what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, 6 and 7. It is a sermon that Jesus preached on one occasion in his ministry and what he is doing in this section of Scripture in these three chapters, he is explaining the nature of true repentance. What does it mean to repent and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you look at Matthew 4:17, you'll see that Jesus gave a command as he opened his ministry, a summary statement of all that his ministry meant when he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He is calling people out of the world to come to faith in him in order that they might enter into the kingdom of heaven, and it's important for us to realize and to recognize that this is the only way to heaven. The only way to heaven is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is one name given among heaven by which we must be saved, Acts 4:12 says, and that name is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And in order to call people into his kingdom, he makes commands, he calls upon them, and he calls upon them in different ways but with the same basic meaning. In Matthew 4:17, he said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In John 1:43, he said, "Follow Me." In Matthew 11:28, he said, "Come to Me." In John 14:1, he said, "Believe in Me." Repent, follow me, come to me, believe in me, and with the authority that alone belongs to the eternal Son of God, he calls men to give their lives to him, to come out of the world, to repent from sin and to put their faith in him.

So it is a staggering call if you remember something about the Lord Jesus Christ. Scripture says that he had no earthly form or appearance that we should be drawn to him. He was God and yet he was God in human flesh. There was nothing about him outwardly to distinguish him from the men around him, and to imagine, to think about what that must have been like for a man to stand up and make obvious claims to be the eternal Son of God, to say that he alone was the way, the truth and the life and that no one comes to the Father but through him, is to realize that he is making a staggering claim. What was Christ saying back then? What is he saying now? Here's what he's saying: Christ is saying that he alone has the authority to give eternal life. Christ alone has the authority to forgive your sin.

And friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, I would just remind you that Scripture tells us that there is no man who continually does good and never sins. There is no one like that.

We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and so that's not open to debate. The fact that you are not a good person is not open to debate. Scripture has already spoken and declares us all guilty before a holy God, the question is what do we do with that truth. What do we do with the fact that we have broken God's law. What do we do with the fact that we fall short of his glory. What do we do with the fact that Romans 1 declares that his wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, which means that it's against us as well. What do we do with that. That's pretty profoundly important. It's far more important than anything earthly about your job, your family, your future, your past. None of that matters by comparison to this claim of Christ and this declaration of Scripture that all men have fallen short of the glory of God.

Well, what Scripture tells us is that Jesus Christ purchased the forgiveness of sin when he gave his life on the cross for sinners just like you. The promise of the Gospel is one that you should hear again afresh today and remember this, that the promise of the Gospel is a promise of grace. It is a promise of undeserved favor. It is a promise of the goodness of God to unworthy sinners like you. And that's staggering. It's staggering to realize that you and I are not good enough for God and never will be. There is nothing that you can do to fix your spiritual condition. You're like Humpty Dumpty in that sense, you have fallen off the wall of God's righteousness and no man can put it back together again for you. You cannot put it back together. You cannot unscramble the egg of your past sin even if you were to live a perfectly righteous life going forward from this day forward, which you won't. You cannot atone for your sin. You cannot make up for it with good works, with rituals. You can't ignore it. Scripture just shines the light on it. And yet the Gospel tells us that God will receive everyone without exception into his family who comes to Christ by faith for salvation. This is glorious. This tells us that God is gracious; that Christ has made a perfect atonement for sin and now he presents it to you and says, "This gift can be yours if you will come and follow me."

How can he do that? How can it be that Christ would make such a perfect atonement? How does that solve your sin problem? It's this way, beloved: Jesus Christ was perfect and he is perfect, and he lived a life of perfect obedience to the law of God; never sinned; never succumbed to temptation like you and I do; never had an unworthy thought, an unworthy motive; never did anything unworthy; never spoke anything unworthy. His life was perfectly pleasing to God and the offer of salvation is that you can partake of that righteousness, you can be joined to that righteousness through faith in Christ but only through faith in Christ.

Salvation brings you into union with Christ in a way where that perfect righteousness is credited to you as if you had done it yourself. The gate to heaven is open when you rely on a righteousness that is not of your own, you rely on something outside of you. Your confidence of reconciliation with God is in the goodness and righteousness of Christ, not in anything of your own hands or your own doing. It humbles us to realize that we are ruined and we cannot save ourselves. It humbles us, for sure, but beloved, at the same time, it lifts us up to see the magnificent love and goodness of God to realize that despite his righteous wrath, he has made a way for you to be reconciled to him. It's magnificent.

That's why the Gospel is called good news. The Gospel convicts us all and then the Gospel offers to all pardon for sin and reconciliation to God through faith in Christ.

Now, what is faith, then? We say that we are justified, we are reconciled to God by faith. What can we say about that faith? Well, true faith believes that promise. True faith takes God at his word and says, "I know that that is true and I am confident that God will honor his promise." True faith receives Christ, welcomes him, embraces him, and rests in him and says this, beloved, and here is the distinction between true Christianity and false versions that say salvation is only obtained by faith plus works, faith in Christ plus your good works will save you. That is a lie from hell. Don't believe that because it is faith alone that can save you. True faith rests in Christ. True faith says, "Christ has done it and I rest in him. I cease in even trying to be good enough for God because I realize I can't. I'm not. I can't. I won't ever be. I rest in Christ alone and I trust him to save me and to bring me to heaven by his righteousness. I trust his finished work alone to be reconciled to God."

Now beloved, here's the thing: the faith that saves you, the grace that saves you, better stated, is also a grace that changes you. It is a grace that transforms you and makes you into someone new. The grace of God is not simply a benign, passive willingness to overlook your sin. The grace of God is an active dynamic that transforms the one that it saves and that is why there is no such thing as somebody coming truly to Christ and living in an unbroken manner just like he did before. You see, when God saves you, he gives you a new nature. You are born again. You are transformed so that your life starts to change and not just in external behavior, you say, "Okay, I'm going to start going to church now or I'll start reading the Bible now." Those are all good things to do, don't misunderstand me, but there is a change inside you. There is a change in your attitudes and your affections. There is a change in what you love and your orientation in life and grace brings about a transformation like that so that life change is inevitable because a new principle of life has been placed inside you. As we often say, 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If any man is in Christ, he has become a new creation. Behold, the old things have passed away, new things have come." And you start to live according to that new dynamic. You have been brought out of the kingdom of Satan and placed in the kingdom of Christ. Your dead heart has been replaced with a living heart. Your heart of stone has been replaced with a heart of flesh. The Holy Spirit himself comes to indwell you. Beloved, this is nothing less than a miracle. You know, people want to see miracles, you know, call down lightning from the sky or heal me of my sore back miraculously. That kind of stuff. Beloved, those are all cheap knockoffs, modern-day cheap knockoffs of what the true miracle is. The true miracle is when God works on a heart and changes that person from the inside. That's the true miracle. Regeneration, the new birth is a miracle that comes down from heaven on the heart of an individual sinner in order to lead them to faith in Christ and the question for you today as you sit here is: do you know the new birth? Have you been born again?

Well, there is a way to tell that, that we are going to see from today's passage. It's not the only way that you can distinguish that, to discern it, but there is a way for you to know that that resounds deeply in your heart. You see, when you have been born again, the

central motivation of your life changes from what it used to be and that's what we're going to see today from Matthew 6:19 through 24. Look at it with me. We looked at the first three verses of this text last week, we'll read the six verses together and then focus on the last three here this morning.

Matthew 6:19, Jesus said,

19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 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.

Now, what is Jesus saying here about the nature of true faith, that's the question. What is it that distinguishes true faith from false faith? What is it that is active in the heart of a true believer that is different from someone who has not been born again? Even if that person professes Christ with his lips, there is something going on in his heart that would show that he is still dead in sin. Scripture makes it plain that there will be many on the last day who will cry out to Christ, "Lord, Lord, did we not do all this stuff?" And Jesus will say to them, "Depart from me. I never knew you."

And you see, beloved, we tend to say, we tend to repeat these things a lot here from week to week and month to month and year to year, but it's because it's so important, really nothing else matters, in one sense, than what we are talking about here, and it's just so important for you not to be deceived about the state of your soul. There are eternal consequences. Either we are going to go to heaven and live with Christ in blessedness around the throne of God forever and ever, amen, or we will die in our sins, perhaps self-deceived, some perhaps knowing fully well that they don't belong to Christ, but never contemplating truly the awful consequences of what eternal judgment in hell will be like. The consequences are so vast and as I say to you many times and as an old preacher once said, that we ought to preach as though never to preach again as a dying man to dying men. I am a dying man, not because my health is bad at the moment, but my life is short and will come to an end, and so will yours, and I can't assume that I'm going to have another chance to speak to you, that you will come again, that you will hear again. This may be the only chance to hear these things. And we walk away and we'll move out and we'll file out through the front door in an hour and be an hour closer to our eternal destiny, an hour closer to your appointment with Christ, and it is so urgent, it is the most essential matter of all that your soul be prepared for that time. You must be born again, Jesus said. You must come to faith in Christ if that is to go well for you. And if it doesn't go well for you, oh, oh, oh, the vast darkness that awaits you. And so it's important for us to know what Jesus means when he says, "Come to me. Follow me. Believe in me." And

there is the point that he is making in these verses that we just read that helps us understand what it is that he is saying.

What is it about true faith? What is the distinguishing mark of genuine true faith that comes from God and is not simply a man-made effort to try to change externally? What is Jesus saying here? Write it down, the definition here this morning is simple. This isn't an exhaustive definition of faith but it is a central key element of it: true faith gives undivided loyalty to Christ. True faith gives undivided loyalty to Christ. Stated differently, true faith gives its ultimate allegiance to Christ and to Christ alone. That is the distinguishing mark of true faith from everything else.

I can remember in the days before I became a Christian, I became a Christian so many years ago, however long ago that might have been. I remember it well, I'm just not stating the number. And there was this sense in my depraved darkened mind that I was a Christian when I wasn't. There was this sense that I would follow Christ but it was always with a competing sense of loyalty because the real motivation of my heart was I wanted earthly prosperity and even more than that, earthly recognition. I wanted to be known as somebody and that's what really mattered deep in my heart and I just tried to paste Christ onto the side of that, but the central loyalty, the central love of my life was Don Green. The central love of my life at that point had nothing to do with Christ at all as shown by the selfishness and anger that marked my life at that time. Well, true faith is not like that and, beloved, you all need to examine your hearts and look deeply into what it is that you love and what motivates you in life, what you care about, because Jesus is bringing all of that to the surface and exposing it to examination by the word of God.

True faith gives undivided loyalty to Christ, undivided loyalty to the God of the Bible, and Jesus makes this point here in these six verses with three contrasts. He contrasts three things to illustrate his point. He reasons from things simple, ordinary things that we understand in earthly existence, he uses illustrations from earthly existence to help us see a greater spiritual reality, and in these three examples, he is making the same point to show that true faith gives undivided loyalty and allegiance to Christ himself, and so we are able to look at our hearts and say, "Is this true of the love of my life or not?"

He makes three contrasts. In verses 19 to 21, he contrasts treasures on earth with treasures in heaven and says, "What is it that you treasure? What is it that you love? Is it things pertaining to earth, whether that's relationships or prosperity or whatever it might be, or is it the things in heaven and the life to come?" And even more, "Is your allegiance and your love and your treasure ultimately the King of heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ?" That's what we looked at last time. Here in our passage today, verses 22 to 24, he contrasts a clear eye with a bad eye and I'll explain that. Verse 24, he contrasts having two masters, one master or the other, what is the choice going to be? And in these contrasts, what he does is that this is a call from Christ, this is a clarification of what true faith is that calls for you to make a fundamental, absolute presuppositional choice about what it is that you're going to live for; a fundamental choice about life and what the orientation of your life is going to be.

Now, beloved, let me say this to you: nobody is born into this world with a natural disposition to make Christ the supreme priority of their life. This is calling for a conscious choice of direction that is made in what is said here, and that's why Jesus phrases it in forms of commands. A command calls you to make a choice about whether you will obey or disobey so that in verse 19, look at it with me, he commands and says, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth," verse 20, "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven." What is it that your heart will love in this life, is the point. And he states it as a command. True faith treasures the kingdom of God above this life and is aware of the fact that it has gone in that conscious direction, it has gone after Christ, it has submitted to him, embraced him, bowed the knee before him, given all of yourself to him. Is that true of your life? Is that true of your heart? Because you cannot know the kingdom of God, you cannot truly know Christ unless that is the fundamental...

(Baby crying) Thank you for that affirmation, young person. From the lips of babes, truth will be affirmed. (Baby murmuring) Amen.

True faith treasures the kingdom of God above this life, above everything else in this life. And now in today's text we are going to see that true faith expresses itself in undivided loyalty to the God of our salvation. We are going to look at the two illustrations here. First of all the eye illustration, e-y-e, your physical human eye. Jesus uses the human eye as an illustration.

Jesus had spoken of the heart in verse 21. Look at it with me. He says, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." The original language says, "there also will be your heart." And now in verse 22, Jesus is continuing the theme about where your heart is and look at verse 22 with me. He says,

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

Now, beloved, just think with me. Remember that Jesus is using simple illustrations here. He's using things that are easily grasped even by an illiterate person to understand the most precious and the most profound truths about the kingdom of God. What can we say about the physical eye, the organ of the eye? Well, physically speaking, the eye is the organ that allows light into the body. Clear eyes, good eyes, allow the body to find its way.

Now, the word "clear" that Jesus uses here was used in the Greek Old Testament to talk about a singleness of purpose or undivided loyalty. A related word is used in 2 Corinthians 11:3 when Paul talks about the simplicity of devotion to Christ; the single naturedness of following after Christ. What Jesus is doing here is he is using the eye as a metaphor for the heart, for the inner man, and he is calling for undivided loyalty to him and his kingdom.

And here's what this means and I'll illustrate this with you in a way that makes this clear to you. Your devotion to Jesus Christ, stated differently, the true Christian has a devotion

to Christ that is simple in the sense that it is single. You can talk about a liquid that is simple meaning that it is not mixed with other things. It is a single pure liquid. The devotion to Christ is simple in that sense and here's what it means: it means that your reverence for Christ, your recognition of him as Lord, your devotion to him is – watch this – it is the unifying principle that determines your thinking about all of life. What do I think about my job, about my relationships, the reason that I exist, all of those to the Christian are unified by a greater principle that says, "Christ is over all of it so that I am devoted to Christ in my work, in my relationships, in these other matters of life, and that Christ is over it all. And I recognize that and I embrace that. I recognize," the true Christian says, "I recognize the authority of Christ over all of life because he is Lord of all. I recognize that and, therefore, I submit to him in every aspect of my life."

That fundamental simple principle determines your course of action in so many ways. Somebody comes to you and says, "You know, if you just cheat a little bit on your taxes, you can save \$10,000 here." Well, the one who loves the world and loves money as the defining principle of his life says, "How can I do that?" The one who recognizes the authority of Christ, that determines his answer and says, "But the Lord says you shall not bear false witness." As we have often spoken, the martyrs in the first century were commanded at the point of a sword to say, "You say that Caesar is Lord or we'll kill you." The one earthly oriented, concerned for his life could say, "Caesar is Lord," because he is concerned to preserve his earthly existence. The one who has undivided loyalty to Christ says, "No, Christ is Lord. Here is my neck. Whatever else I do, I won't betray the name and the Lordship of Christ. Let my life go if it must, I cannot go there. I will not go there." Undivided loyalty to Christ no matter the earthly cost is the sense.

And beloved, here's the thing. Let's think a little bit more about the eye and what it's like. When your eyes are good, I have at least one blind friend, maybe a couple or so and, you know, they can't make their way, they can't see where they're going physically, but you don't have to be blind to understand the significance of what Jesus is saying. What happens to you when you get a piece of grit or you get something in your eye and you feel it and it's kind of scraping around on that sensitive part of your eye? It stops everything, doesn't it? You can't see right and your eyes start to tear up and you start rubbing them and everything stops because your eye isn't clear, and what's going on in your eye has now taken control of the rest of your body and nothing can be addressed until that is taken away and cleared out. You know what that's like. Well, that's the sort of thing that Jesus is saying here. When he talks about his eye, he's talking about, you could say, the eye of your heart. What is it in your heart that governs the way that you look at life? The way that you think? What is it that governs your choices and all of that? A clear heart understands and knows that Jesus Christ is the greatest treasure and there is nothing in second place. There is an exclusive devotion to him that is settled, that is embraced, that is loved, and to the true believer he says, "Christ is my greatest love. Christ is the object of my affection. Everything belongs to Christ and everything in life is driven by that engine on the tracks." There is no other engine to the true Christian.

That means that to the true Christian, Jesus Christ is your best thought. He is your highest love. You want to know him from Scripture. And yes, we might struggle with sin and

temptation and stumble along the way, but the animating principle of life is this: is that you love him supremely and you want to please him even though sometimes you fall short of that. You want your life to please him and, beloved, this is it, oh, this is it, oh, hear me, for the sake of your own eternal soul, hear me: everything else in life revolves around that one fundamental principle, the supremacy of Christ and the desire to please him. That governs everything else. That's what a clear heart sees. You have that clear in your mind. That is settled. That is not open to negotiation or revocation. The clear heart says, "I recognize Christ as supreme and that governs everything in my life."

Jesus says when the eye is clear, verse 22, your whole body will be full of light. Friends, if the supremacy of Christ is clear to you, then everything else falls into place in life. You recognize the authority of the word that he proposed. You recognize that nothing can compete with your affections and loyalties, and everything in life is driven by that love for him. But what happens when that's not clear? Verse 23,

23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

Beloved, how can I say this to make it something that you will receive in your heart? Your love for the world, your love for the things of this life, choke out true faith and perhaps even is an indication that you have never come to true faith at all, no matter what kind of lip service you pay to Christ. Jesus himself made a very clear point of this in Matthew 13.

Turn over to Matthew 13 with me. Matthew 13:22. This is in the middle of the parable of the sower who went out and sowed seed on different kinds of ground. Jesus said in verse 22, "the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns," actually let's go back up and look at that so that you see what I'm saying here. Let's just read the whole thing. "Hear then the parable of the sower," verse 18. "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself," it's not settled in his heart, his eye is not clear, "but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." Jesus says, "He hears the word but he is preoccupied with the things of the world. The things of the world make him anxious, divide and conquer his attentions. And the deceitfulness of wealth, the love of money, the love of things that always the greedy desire for more," Jesus says, "chokes the word so it has no fruit in his life."

You see, beloved, Christ is teaching us to look at our heart and say what is it that we love preeminently, and your preoccupation with earthly things, with material wealth, with the activities of this world, and then that just drives what you do, is an indication that something is wrong with the eye of your heart. You are not seeing things clearly like that.

You're not. You're not, beloved. Oh, hear me. Hear the word of God on this. It has to be clear in your mind that Christ is supreme in the loyalties and the affections of your heart.

So as you go through life, sometimes obedience to Christ may threaten your financial interests. It may put family relationships at risk. Do you know what's going to happen if that's the case, if that's the soil of your heart, if that's the eye of your heart? If you love first the world and the approval of men, do you know what you will do inevitably, guaranteed, the outcome is assured? You will compromise. You will sin. You will choose the things of this world even at the expense of sinning or rejecting Christ because your heart has never seen the supremacy of Christ and embraced him as the first love of your life. And so you go through life that way, not even realizing the thick darkness that is enveloping your heart, your life, your perceptions; thinking everything is cool as long as prosperity is relatively okay; never recognizing that darkness has descended on your heart because you've got a bad eye. Your bad eye is a metaphor for the fact that you have attached your love to the wrong priorities.

But by contrast, for the true Christian who has been born again, who is starting to grow in grace and being sanctified, when you have settled beforehand that Christ is preeminent, then you can let goods go. You can let prosperity go if it comes to that. You can leave behind this life in pursuit of Christ. You can let family members go if the choice is between them or loyalty to Christ. Those questions become clear to you. Those questions do not even become difficult anymore, even though they may grieve your heart to lose a relationship for the sake of Christ. That might grieve your heart but the principle is, "But this is about Christ. I can do no other." So someone walks away from you in a relationship, a friendship, or in family and says, "I will not have you if you must stay to Christ," and perhaps with tears streaming down your face say, "Here I stand. I can do no other. If you leave that is your choice, but Christ is preeminent even over you, my friend." That is a clear heart. That's the clarity of which Jesus speaks.

Beloved, let me say this. If you are not interested in the things of Scripture, if you have no desires for Christ, or perhaps you think you do but you just find yourself constantly struggling spiritually, one foot in the world, one foot with Christ, and you are just struggling spiritually saying, "Man, the Christian life is really hard," my encouragement to you would be to step back and ask yourself what about your spiritual eye. Do you see clearly the preeminence of Christ or not? If you are just known for a spiritual struggle, perhaps, I'm just saying perhaps, beloved, perhaps you have never settled on undivided loyalty to Christ as the defining principle of your life, as that which settles everything else, because Jesus said, "If the eye is clear, the whole body is full of light." If Christ is clear in your life, even if you go through struggles, at least you see your way forward and not the back-and-forth that some of us have known in the past.

So go back to Matthew 6 here. The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. If your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. You can't see anything clearly in life because who Christ is is not settled in your affections and understanding.

If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

The original language reads this way: the darkness, how great. How great is the darkness if you don't know Christ in the manner of which we are speaking? Nothing can make up for it. Nothing can bring light to the body if the eye is blind. Nothing can help you spiritually until you embrace the supremacy of Christ as Lord over you. Everything else is just darkness and confusion apart from that. And some of you if you were honest, would nod your head in sad agreement, "That is true of me."

That's the eye illustration. Jesus goes on in verse 24 and uses the slave illustration. The slave illustration. If the eye is clear and clean, you can see clearly and go forward. If Christ is clear, you can see clearly and go forward. You get dirt in the eye, it stops, it hurts, it irritates and you can't see anything, it clouds up everything. If you love the world, especially if you just consciously love sin in your life, that which is supposed to give light to your understanding, your inner man, is dark. And if your heart is dark, how great is the darkness? There is no way of finding your way out of that save from an act of mercy from God. That's the idea.

Point 2: the slave illustration. Jesus makes the point of undivided loyalty with a second picture. Look at verse 24, when he says,

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.

Wealth being a representative of the things of this world.

Now, this metaphor of serving two masters is illustrating the same truth about the need for undivided loyalty to Christ. The word "serve" is from a verbal form of the noun that means "slave."

And in the first century, we need to understand something, when Jesus talks about having two masters here, this is not like the modern equivalent of carrying two part-time jobs. You go to one job and you go to the other and, you know, some of you live life in that realm and that's fine. Just understand that's not what Jesus is talking about here. In the first century, a slave belonged to his master. His master had complete dominion over him and the slave owed his master exclusive loyalty. We've talked about that in the past. And what a simple fact of life is this: is that a person who is a slave cannot simultaneously give exclusive devotion to one master and also give at the same time exclusive devotion to a second master. It's one or the other. There is only one boss. There is only one master over a slave and it is to that master that he gives his service, loyalty and devotion. Conflicting demands – watch this – just picture a slave with two masters and one master tells him, "Go east and do my business," and 10 minutes later the second master says, "Go west and do my business." You cannot do that. You cannot obey one. You will either obey the command of the one who said go east or you will obey the one who said go west. Either way, you're going to be disobeying one of them. You will be betraying your

devotion and call of loyalty to one of them because you cannot have two masters. Conflicting demands mean you will fail one or the other.

What is Jesus saying here? He's saying you cannot own Christ as Lord and simultaneously love the world because Christ is opposed to the world; Christ calls us out of the world; Christ says things that pull us out of the world; cause us to be disobedient, as it were, to the demands of the world on us; to reject the world's worldview; to reject the world's rejection of Christ; and to reject the world's rejection of God as he has revealed himself in creation and in his word. You can't have it both ways. You can't please the world, you can't please those who demand you to be worldly like them, and simultaneously please Christ. It's one or the other. It cannot be both. Jesus says you are not able to do this. This cannot happen.

Now, look at it with me again and there are going to be a couple of Scriptures here that are very very penetrating in their effect in illustration of what this means. Jesus says in verse 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." Now, the word "hate" is really strong, isn't it? We use the word "hate," that's a severe word to us. Now, "hate" here, and I'm going to illustrate this for you so just follow with me for the moment, "hate" is not used in an intense absolute sense here. When it is used side-by-side with the word "love," it has a comparative sense and you'll see this if you turn to Luke 14:26. This expands and illustrates the whole principle of loyalty as well as the sense of hate and love here.

Luke 14:25. I'll give you just a moment as those pages continue to crinkle. Luke 14:25, "Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them," notice that these are large crowds so this is going to be a mixture of those who perhaps had heard him teach in the past, were actually truly following him, and others who were just there along for the ride, who had somehow gathered around. This is a mixed audience of those who knew Christ and those who didn't. Large crowds going to him and what did he say to them? Verse 26, he says, "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." As we said earlier, Christ would call people sometimes by saying, "Come to me." Here in Luke 14:26, he's explaining what that, "Come to me," looks like. He's explaining, as it were, the condition upon which you would come, or perhaps better stated, he clarifies what the nature of true faith is. True faith in Christ is a conscious rejection of the world in comparison to its love and reception of Christ.

When Jesus says you must hate your own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, let's be clear about something and just something that's obvious: the same Christ who said this is the same Spirit behind the commandment which said, "Honor your father and mother." Christ is not telling us now to disobey the fifth commandment. He's not doing that. He's making a more profound point that he assumes that you have sense enough to see. It's about where do your final loyalties lie. What is your view of Christ. And true faith comes to Christ with the recognition and understanding that he is above all; that he is Lord; that the final, best, highest, ultimate

loyalty of my heart belongs to him. I take my soul, as it were, and I place it in his nail scarred hands, the one who gave his life for me, and I recognize that he is my ultimate Master. He is my ultimate relationship. He is the one to whom I finally belong. And by comparison to that, my loyalty to parents, to spouse, to children, is so secondary that by comparison it seems like hatred because my love for Christ is so far surpassing to these earthly human relationships. That's the idea. It's not that you literally hate them and despise them and spit on their shoes, it's that by comparison, "I can't love you more than I love the one who has saved my soul." That's unthinkable to the true Christian.

So Christ lays it out for us in a way that says, "Okay, what do you ultimately love in life? Where is your highest treasure? Your deepest affection?" Does it belong to Christ so that by comparison every earthly, even the closest earthly relationships go into the shadows by comparison? Jesus says, "If it's not like that for you, you can't be my disciple." He is Lord and he will not take second place. He is not a co-regent in your life. He is King or he's nothing.

Look over at Matthew 10 where you see this again. These are hard sayings of Jesus and he calls you to make a choice. In verse 37, he 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." You know, with one exception my whole family is in this room. I love them. I've had wonderful years with them. They are dear and precious to me in ways that transcend every other earthly relationship. It is not a diminishment of that love for me to publicly say, and they understand, that by comparison Christ is so far more, he is so infinitely more than them. That is what Christ is saying. You love them but not more than Christ and that is settled in your heart so that you see that the Master – follow it this way – the master of my affections cannot be an earthly relationship. The Master, the Lord, the King of my heart for every true Christian, is Christ and Christ alone. And Jesus says, "If it's not that way, you are not worthy of me." It's very searching, isn't it?

He goes on and says in verse 38, "he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." You say, "But I don't want it that way. I want to treasure these relationships. I want to keep my life as it is. I don't want to change. I don't want a reorientation of priorities, a reorientation of my affections. I don't want that. Jesus, can't you receive me anyway? Can't you take me into heaven while I cling to the things of this world?" And Jesus says, "No. I can't. I won't."

Verse 39 he says, "He who has found his life will lose it." You cling to this world, you lose everything in the end. "He who has lost his life for My sake will find it." You come to Christ, you embrace him, you give yourself to him, you get all of the riches of Christ, you get all the fullness of salvation, you get heaven forever and ever and ever amen, plus everything earthly besides. You come to Christ and he graciously grants forgiveness of your sin, covers you with his righteousness, ushers you into the very presence of God where you are now a welcome son or daughter of God. If you would reject that for the sake of a passing fascination with this world or a relationship in this world and say, "I won't give Christ that because this world is more important," beloved, all I can say is this, I say it reverently, gently, for your edification, but let there be no doubt about the clarity

with which we say it: if you would reject all of that in Christ because you are not willing to let go of something in this passing world, beloved, all we can say is with grief in our hearts, your condemnation is just. Hebrews says, "How much severer judgment will he deserve who has trampled on the blood of Christ?" You would trample on the blood of Christ? You would look at the King of glory who died for sinners just like you and say, "Do you know what? There are things more important than you. Step aside while I pursue my earthly life." That's blasphemous. That's the greatest sin of all because the greatest commandment is that you would love this God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. We're just trying to be clear here and bring out the implications of what Christ has said.

Now, having said that and made that point clear, let me address my brothers and sisters in Christ in the room. I know that some of you have paid a serious price for your faith in Christ. It has brought untold heartache into human relationships for you. Some of you have lost jobs because you wouldn't compromise. Some of you have seen your life go directions you never anticipated and things kind of fizzled out and you look back and you say, "You know, I could have had so much more if I had not done this for Christ." Beloved, recognize that Christ is no man's debtor; that Christ said that even when you are persecuted for his sake, you are blessed; that this isn't lost in the books, in the accounts of heaven. But even your suffering for Christ is part of his way of blessing you, conforming you to his image, helping you understand what life was like with him in his own earthly life who was rejected and despised by men, and that you could enter into the fellowship of his sufferings and that you could know him more intimately by direct personal experience.

Beloved, when you follow Christ like that, it comes out well for you in the end. Don't despair. Don't give up. Renew your hope and confidence that the Christ who saved you will bless you in the end because on the authority of God's word I can assure you infallibly without fear of contradiction, that he most certainly will. He is good. He is faithful. He knows who are his own and he will never let anyone or anything pluck them out of his hand. "Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. So I am convinced that neither angels nor principalities nor death nor life nor any other created thing can separate us from the will of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," Romans 8:38 and 39.

So beloved, where are your loyalties? What is your loyalty? What is it that you care about and give yourself to? What is it that drives the decisions that you make? Is it loyalty to Christ or loyalty to anything else, even if it's just your own self-interest? Sinclair Ferguson says this and with this I close our brief time together. He says, "Compromise of loyalties leads to uncertainty, to anxiety and ultimately to spiritual disaster, now loving one master, now serving another master. It is vital for our spiritual well-being that the question of our devotion be settled once and for all." And he closes with this penetrating question, my friends, "Have you resolved that issue?"

Let's pray.

Our God, take these words, seal them to our hearts. Help us to see the high and lofty nature of Christ and that nothing else is worthy of our devotion and our loyalty. May each one walk out of this room safe and secure in Christ for their well-being and more importantly, Father, for the glory of our everlasting King. We pray these things through his name. Amen.

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