

1 We're continuing our worship series this morning, "Life Beyond Belief." God is inviting each one of us into a journey of change, learning to really lean into living the love of God out loud. Along the way, God often surprises us, challenging our assumptions and the way we've been living. Sometimes, we're challenged to understand God's Word, the Bible, in new ways. Contrary to what some pastors may have told you, the Bible isn't really easy to read. In particular, it's easy to misunderstand or only loosely define figures of speech like metaphors. A metaphor is a saying like, "There's an elephant in the room." The Bible is full of metaphors like lightness and darkness, soils and seeds, pearls and nets, often with the meanings differing among teachings and teachers. A life beyond belief challenges us to dig deeply into the meaning of the Bible even as we try to put it into practice, with every reading a fresh encounter with the living Word of God. This morning we'll try to learn what Jesus meant by "darkness," and how we can move beyond darkness into the light.

2 We've been making our way through the eleventh chapter of Luke. We're picking up with verse 33 today in the New Living Translation.

{Read Luke 11:33-36, NLT}.

One of the vexing challenges of reading the Bible is that the four Gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tend to rearrange the order of events and even the teachings of Jesus in order to emphasize one thing over another. Sometimes it's difficult to say exactly what Jesus originally intended, so we're left saying that John intended this, or Matthew intended that. This passage from Luke falls into this category. What we have here is two sayings about lamps that appear in differing contexts in the Gospels of Matthew (chapters 5 and 6), Mark (chapter 4), and Luke (chapters 8 and 11). We all know what lamps, light, eyes, and darkness are, but what do the metaphors really mean in these three Gospels?

3 We can safely say that the "light" in both lamp sayings among the three Gospels that include them refers to the teachings of Jesus. Matthew's emphasis is on sharing that light, so he adds, "let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your

heavenly Father.”¹ That’s probably the saying that most of us would think of first. Mark and Luke, on the other hand, include admonitions to understand and receive the teachings of Jesus, but say nothing about sharing the light. Fortunately for us, both teachings can be true and both are equally helpful. It’s essential that we wrestle with our understanding of the Bible, even as we grow in the ways we live that understanding in view of a watching world.

4 It’s the second lamp saying that we’re going to focus on today, what Jesus calls the lamp of our eye. What is a “bad” eye, and how does it lead to darkness? Accepting that the “light” in the second lamp saying is still the teaching of Jesus, all three Gospel writers agree that a bad eye is something that fills our lives with the antithesis of what Jesus taught; darkness, the absence of light. And while Mark and Luke remain a little vague as to the specifics of the darkness, Matthew makes his meaning abundantly clear. The darkness that fills the corners of our hearts and drives out the light of Jesus is the greed and worry surrounding material things. Matthew brackets his lamp teaching with two other teachings that you’ll recognize: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”² And “You cannot serve both God and money.”³

This is a topic that cuts close to the heart of all of us as we seek to live out our faith in a culture that increasingly revolves around commerce. So before we dive further into how we can move beyond this particular darkness, I thought a little biting humor might be appreciated. Here’s a short satirical commentary on this condition of darkness from the Skit Guys. {**Show edited video- Greed Harmony, 1:25**}

5 Do you know what a black hole is? As I understand it, a black hole is when a star collapses in on itself and becomes so dense that the gravity around it becomes too strong for even light to escape it. The Skit-Guys video wouldn’t be so funny if it didn’t speak to a deep and uncomfortable truth: We’ve all made compromises in our lives that trade the teachings of Jesus for our material comfort. Sin is like a black hole in the center of our hearts. The more we choose things that are contrary to the Kingdom teachings of Jesus, the less likely we are to live lives that shine with the light of Christ. I’ve said before that I think we’re

¹ Matthew 5:16-17, NLT

² Matthew 6:21, NIV

³ Matthew 6:24, NIV

intended to experience some tension in our faith lives, a discomfort that leads us to continually examine our lives and grow in our Christ-following. I'd be very surprised if there was anyone here today who couldn't think of at least one way in which they've made compromises in their lifestyle to what they believe is God's perfect will. That's the fallen human condition and that's why we need to move beyond belief, beyond the darkness and into the light.

6 I came across a great prescription for relieving the darkness of greed in a meditation by David Mathis that compares our tendency toward greed to the greed of the dragon Smaug in the J.R.R. Tolkien book, *The Hobbit*.⁴ In the fantasy world of *The Hobbit*, Smaug's life revolved around accumulating and protecting his treasure hoard. Unfortunately, the sickness of greed that afflicted Smaug didn't die when he was slain. Thorin Oakenshield, the dwarven King Under the Mountain, allowed his greed for the dragon's treasure to poison his compassion and love. Borrowing from *The Hobbit*, Mathis offers three "battle cries" that ordinary heroes like us can use to move beyond the darkness of Greed when we're tempted to buy more "stuff."

The first battle cry is simple: "I can wait." Waiting is something that's an increasingly foreign concept in our culture. I'm not usually very good at waiting, although I remember being one of the last holdouts to give up dial-up internet service for broadband. Today I feel like I'm one of the few who hasn't subscribed to Amazon Prime for the free, over-night delivery service. I don't know about you, but what I need is less speed, not more, when it comes to spending. Impulse spending tends to circumvent our best intentions and cater to our baser desires. Taking a little self-imposed time-out before buying something can give you a little time to bounce your spending plans past the Holy Spirit (and possibly past your holy spouse, too!) So before you make your next impulse purchase, try repeating this battle cry, "I can wait!" Say it out loud with me now: "I can wait!"

The second battle cry is: "Giving is better." Every spending decision we make is necessarily related to every giving decision we make. What we tend to do is make all our spending decisions first, until we find ourselves with no real decision left to us concerning

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/how-to-fight-dragon-sickness>

giving. Remember the words of Jesus, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”⁵ We all know that, at least in our heads, but we’re all growing in the way we live that. If “I can wait” fails to temper your desire to buy, try shouting the second battle cry: “Giving is better!” Let’s do that together: “Giving is better!”

The final battle cry is another appeal to what you already know: “I already have the greatest treasure!” The life in Christ is compared in the Bible to a great treasure buried in a field, a treasure so valuable that you’d be a fool not to sell everything you have to buy the field.⁶ Would you really be willing to sell that eternal treasure to a pawn broker just to satisfy the spending impulse that’s captured your heart in the present moment? “I already have the greatest treasure!” Say it with me: “I already have the greatest treasure!”

7 Every faith-stretching journey toward a transformed life begins with one small step. Your challenge this week is to take a step out of the darkness of greed by trying out the three battle cries. Please understand, I’m not asking you to go through the checkout at Cub and start shouting at the cashier when he presents you with your grocery bill, as hilarious as that might be. Instead, be mindful this week of the temptations to make purchases that you know are questionable, spending that somewhere in the corner of your heart the Spirit may be speaking to you about. Here they are again in case you need to write them down: Giving is better. I can wait. I already have the greatest treasure. And if you experience a victory, or if you come up with your own battle cries, I’d love to hear from you!

⁵ Acts 20:35, NLT

⁶ Matthew 13:44.



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...serving people for Jesus Christ so that we all may know joy!

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