



THE GOSPEL OF
Luke

SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 11:33-36

To understand the significance of the eyes as lamps.

“Don’t Look!”

In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, Indy (played by Harrison Ford) and his love interest Marion (played by Karen Allen) find themselves on the side of a mountain, captives of the Nazis who also hold in their possession the ark of the covenant (that’s right, *the* ark of the covenant, but relax, it’s only a movie). The Nazis, along with Indy’s arch nemesis Belloq, perform a ceremony to open the ark, and at first seemed dismayed with what they find in it; it’s only filled with sand! Suddenly, light begins to pour out of it and all of them are captivated by what they see. Jones, at this point, is trying to figure out what’s going on. He realizes they all may be in real danger because the ark, a sacred object, has been opened. He shouts to Marion, “Marion, don’t look at it! Shut your eyes, Marion. Don’t look at it no matter what happens!” Suddenly, everyone who is looking at the light disintegrates. The fire and winds reach hurricane levels. Marion cries at the top of her lungs, “Indy!!!” Jones shouts, “Don’t look, Marion! Keep your eyes shut!”

The eyes play a pivotal role at the end of that movie, and they play a pivotal role in Luke 11:33-36 as well. Jesus, having just condemned the wicked generation of His time for seeking signs, moves to a monologue on the importance of keeping a lamp that has been lit in the open out in the open in a home, “so that those who enter may see the light” (Lk. 11:33), and then He makes this connection to the physiology of the human body: “Your eye is the lamp of your body” (Lk. 11:34). According to Jesus, the health (or lack thereof) of the eye will greatly determine the light or darkness of one’s inner-person.

The Light of Jesus

Verse 33 begins with Jesus saying, “No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light.” This seems almost out of left field coming right after Jesus’ discourse on the wicked generation who demands a sign that will only receive the sign of Jonah (Lk. 11:29-32), but actually this is a follow-up statement that continues His train of thought. Jesus’ point is that this wicked generation has the sign of Jonah before them, Christ Himself, and yet they mistreat this divine light. Anyone who lights a lamp in a home (think ancient home with no electricity) depends upon that lamp to light the living space and provide those inside a means to see. It would be ludicrous to light a lamp and then place it under a basket or in a cellar where it was not able to light the room. It would be violating the very purpose of the lamp. The purpose of the lamp is to illuminate its surroundings, and thus to treat the lamp in this way would be to violate its reason for existence, and yet this is exactly what they have done with Christ. Christ has come to illuminate the world, and yet they have discarded Him to the side, still seeking for some other sign to believe. They fail to rightly recognize Christ and thus discard Him.

In this example, Christ is the lamp. He is the means of light. His point is to connect Himself to the lamp, and then segue into an additional illustration of a lamp, but this time connected to the human eye.

The Light of the Inner-Person

Jesus says in verse 34: “Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness.” In this illustration, the eye is the lamp that is lit by the presence of Christ. The imagery of light from a lamp as a divine metaphor is not uncommon in the Scripture. Psalm 18:28 declares, “For it is you who lights my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness.” 2 Samuel 22:29 says, “For you are my lamp, O LORD, and my God lightens my darkness.” The source of light is a divine source; God Himself. To carry the imagery into the Lukan account, then, Jesus is the divine source of light. This tracks consistently with Luke’s account given he’s already referred to Jesus as a source of light several times (Lk. 1:79; 2:32). Jesus also makes a distinction between those with good eyes and with bad eyes. Below is a breakdown of each category.

THE HEALTHY EYE

Jesus says, “when your eye is healthy” (Lk. 11:34). The term *healthy* is the Greek word ἀπλοῦς (haplous), and it means something like “singleness of purpose, sincerity, free from guile.” In other words, it’s an eye that is free from distractions and capable of clear vision. It’s an eye that is able to do what it was created to do - to see clearly that which it sets its sights upon. This healthy eye is beneficial because “when your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light” (Lk. 11:34). The effects of a healthy eye lead to a spiritually healthy and illuminated whole being.

It’s important to note that the Greco-Roman view of the physiology of the eye is not that it is the window that allows light into the body as much as it is the window that allows one’s inner light out. In other words, the eye will be a lamp that shines forth the light of one’s inner being, unless of course one’s inner being is full of darkness, and then the eye will be seen as not healthy, but rather evil; it will fix its gaze upon things reflective of one’s inner condition.

THE EVIL EYE

In contrast to the healthy eye is the evil eye: “but when it (the eye) is bad, your body is full of darkness” (Lk. 11:34). The term “bad” in the original language is πονηρός (ponēros), and it conveys the idea of “evil or

malignant.” In other words, Jesus is not simply saying the eye is bad or defective, but intent towards the wrong things.

Putting It Together

Knowing what we know about the ancient understanding of the eye, in conjunction with the context of Jesus’ words with regard to those who seek after a sign, the illustration of the eye makes more sense. When one is receptive to Jesus’ words and ministry, it thus reveals something about their inner being, as opposed to the one who demands a different sign; they are wicked and they are full of darkness. Jesus summarizes all of this by saying, “If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light” (Lk. 11:36). A person will shine! This is what Jesus meant, to some extent, when He said: “The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matt. 13:43). They will shine because their righteousness will be reflected in what they focus on, the actions they take, and the sentiment they have for one another.

An additional note should be made here with regard to the nature of parables in general. This is a simple parable that is meant to demonstrate the difference between those who receive Jesus’ words, and those who reject Him. It is not, however, meant to be used as a deeper theological explanation with regard to election, salvation, works vs. grace, or any other technical discussion. Parables are simple tools that convey simple information. Whenever we as interpreters try to extend them beyond their intended usage, we run the risk of over-analyzing them to the point of bad theology.

What About Now?

One takeaway of this is evaluating the “temperature” of non-believers towards Jesus. In evangelism and apologetics, whenever we share our faith we have to recognize that non-believers are spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-3). They are not naturally able to believe in Jesus. However, with that said, there does seem to be a difference between people who are “warmer” to the Gospel message as opposed to those who are “colder” and more in hostile opposition to it. That is not to say that God cannot redeem someone who is “cold,” nor does it mean that all people who are “warm” will be born again, but it is helpful to recognize whether or not they have a healthy or evil eye in order to know how to engage with them.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Luke 11:33. In your own words, write down what Jesus is saying here.

2. Read Luke 11:34. What is the good eye representative of?

Day Two

1. Read Luke 11:34. What is the bad eye representative of?

2. According to the notes, does the eye allow light into the body, or let light out?

Day Three

1. Read Luke 11:34. How can one know whether or not they are full of light or darkness?

2. Read Luke 11:35. In your own words, write down what Jesus intends to communicate.

Day Four

1. Read Luke 11:36. What will the person full of light be like?

2. Read Matthew 13:43. How does this verse interact with our passage?

Week 45 Discussion: Inside Out

In Luke 11:33-36, Jesus tells a parable concerning the eyes. A healthy eye will reflect the light within a person, and the evil eye will not because that person will be full of darkness. We like to think that what we look at will influence who we are on the inside, and while that is somewhat true, Jesus seems more convinced of the idea that what we look at will reveal what we are already like on the inside. Talk as a group about how you can better evaluate your inner condition and address any concerns that come up.

1. Icebreaker: Are you a healthy person? How do you know?
2. Are you in any kind of accountability with others? Why or why not?
3. Do you think it's important to evaluate your thoughts and desires regularly? Why or why not?
4. How do your actions demonstrate a changed life in Christ?
5. How do your actions demonstrate darkness that is in need of light?
6. How can the church help you become more in touch with your inner condition?

Takeaways:

1. Jesus says those who have healthy eyes will reflect the light within them.
2. Jesus says those who have evil eyes will not reflect light because that person will be full of darkness.