

Are You Spiritually Blind?

Matthew 16:1-12 - NCBC, September 13, 2020

Main Point: **Worldliness will blind us from seeing God's kingdom realities.**

- **Worldliness focuses on this world more than on God (1-4)**
 - Do I think like a Pharisee or a Sadducee? (1a)
 - Do I remake God in my own image? (1b)
 - Do I use God as a means to my own earthly ends? (2-4)
- **A life of faith focuses on God more than this world (5-12)**
 - Do I perceive that my greatest dangers are spiritual? (5-8)
 - Do I remember how Jesus has taken care of me? (9-10)
 - Do I understand that God's wisdom is superior to human wisdom? (11-12)

Application: **See your entire life through the lens of faith in Christ.**

Opening Announcements:

- **Compassion Sunday** today offers an opportunity for us to sponsor a child for God's glory. To learn more, text the word "LOVE" to 83393, or visit compassion.com/newcastlebiblechurch.
- **Please keep praying for our pastoral search** this month! Check out our FB page for daily prayer requests.
- **Remember to visit myncbc.org** and follow our NCBC Facebook page to stay informed on all ministry/event updates during this season of careful regathering.

<<Christ Our Hope in Life and Death>>



Behold King Jesus! He is our trustworthy hope in life and death.

This morning we have a privilege that billions of people on the earth today do not have.¹ We are going to read together the very words of God – which He has written down for us, now translated and published in a language

¹ <https://christiantoday.com/article/1-5-billion-people-are-still-waiting-for-a-bible-in-their-own-language/130536.htm>
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that we can understand. So may we be humble and thankful as we prepare to read from **Matthew chapter 16**.

If you're joining us online, please notice the links alongside the livestream offer fill-in-the-blank sermon notes, the preaching manuscript, and children's coloring pages to assist your worship. At any time you may pause this video, print those files, and then rejoin our worship with those notes in front of you.

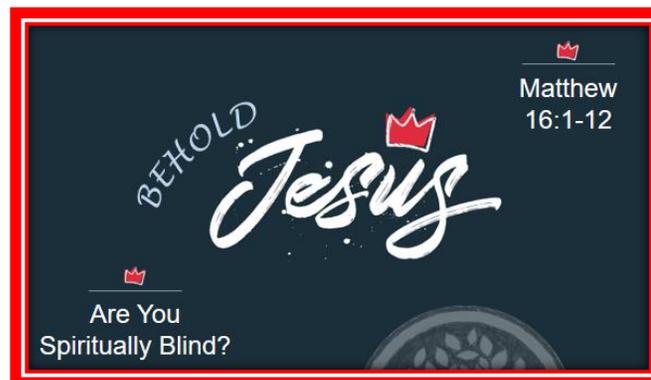
THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW				
1-3 Presentation of the King				
4-7 Proclamation of the King <i>Sermon on the Mount (5-7)</i>	8-10 Power of the King <i>Sending out the 12 Apostles (10)</i>	11-13 Rejection of the King <i>Kingdom Parables (13)</i>	14-20 Priorities of the King <i>Topsy-Turvy Values (18)</i>	21-25 Progress of the King <i>Olivet Discourse (24-25)</i>
Kingdom offered to Israel		Kingdom offered to all Nations		
26-28 Passion & Proof of the King				

As we read from **Matthew 16**, remember **Matthew** is structured to prove Jesus is the long-awaited King in fulfillment of Old Testament prophesy.

Chapter 16 continues Matthew's presentation of Jesus' kingdom being radically different from what the Jews expected. The King's priorities are completely topsy-turvy from the religious teaching of the day!

Therefore, **chapter 16** reveals another confrontation with Israel's religious leaders, introduces the concept of Jesus' church for the first time in history, foretells Jesus' death and resurrection, and emphasizes the necessity of self-denial in Christian discipleship.

Today we are just going to meditate upon Jesus' confrontation with the Israel's religious leaders,



As we consider the blinding influence of worldliness.

So please stand for the public reading of God's Word as I read the ESV translation from **Matthew 16 verse 1**:

And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. 2 He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3 And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. 4 An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed.

5 When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. 6 Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 7 And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." 8 But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you

discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? 9 Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? 10 Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? 11 How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” 12 Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

This is God’s Word. **Let’s Pray Together.**

Are you a worldly Christian? Has your life become spiritually blinded by the yeast of worldliness in you?

Today we learn that,



Worldliness will blind us from seeing God’s kingdom realities. Worldliness obscures and darkens all spiritual sight.

² 2 Kings 6:8-10

³ 2 Kings 6:14

And to introduce this truth I want to remind us of a fascinating account from Elisha’s life back in **2 Kings chapter 6.**

Elisha was God’s prophet sent to Israel during a season when Syria was trying to conquer their nation.

And the king of Syria hated Elisha, because through God’s prophetic gift, Elisha was able to tell Israel’s king of Syria’s war plans in advance, continually foiling their war strategies.²

Therefore in **2 Kings 6** the King of Syria sent a huge army with horses and chariots to surround the city where Elisha and his servant were sleeping.³

When Elisha’s servant got up early in the morning, he was startled to discover they were completely surrounded by the enemy army! So he cried out to Elisha, *What shall we do?*⁴

But Elisha said calmly, *“Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”*⁵

Now put yourself in the sandals of Elisha’s servant. You’ve never excelled at math. But let’s see... there’s two of you, and it looks like about thousand enemy warriors surrounding you. Elisha – I think you need to schedule an eye appointment. You need glasses! What could ever cause you to say there’s more with us than with them?

⁴ 2 Kings 6:15

⁵ 2 Kings 6:16

Then in **verse 17** Elisha prayed and said, “O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see.” And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha!

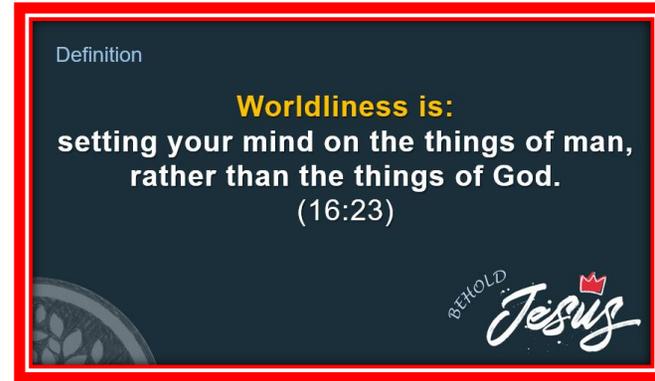
You see, the servant was only looking at what was physical, but Elisha could see what was spiritual. The servant was panicked and despairing because his mind was so focused on his earthly problems that he failed to see all that God was doing in the spiritual realm for him!

Elisha’s servant was blind to God’s kingdom realities around him through the corrupting influence of worldliness. His mind was so set on the things of earth, that he couldn’t even see all God was doing around him for his own good!

Can you relate with Elisha’s servant? Has a spirit of worldliness contaminated blinded your spiritual vision?

Worldliness blinds us from seeing God’s kingdom realities... so we must first carefully define what worldliness is.

Contrary to the teaching of cultural Christianity, worldliness is not an external action, activity, or association. To be infected by worldliness is to be influenced internally and invisibly by spiritual blindness...just like yeast invisibly transforms an entire batch of dough.



From **verse 23** we offer this simple definition of worldliness:

Worldliness is setting your mind on the things of man, rather than the things of God.

Worldliness is a soul disease that affects your spiritual eyesight. To be worldly is to only be able to see what is physical and limited to temporary existence on earth.

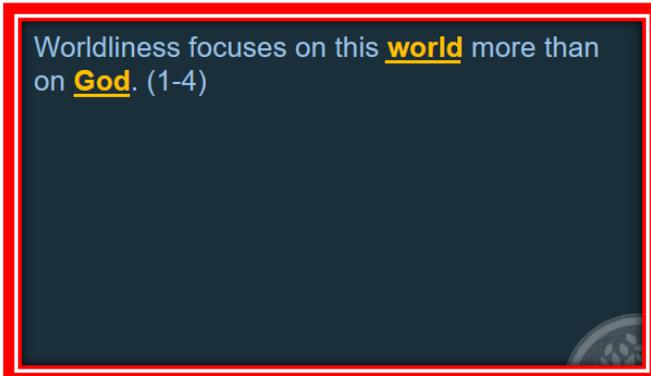
So then, what is the biblical opposite of worldliness? Well, since faith is the conviction of things *not seen*,⁶ the opposite of worldliness is a life of faith.

That’s why the spiritual blindness of Elisha’s panicked servant is worldliness. And why the result of the religious Pharisees’ and Sadducees’ unbelieving teaching in **Matthew 16** is worldliness as well.

So again I ask, are you worldly? Has your faith been blinded by the pervasive unbelief of worldliness?

⁶ Hebrews 11:1
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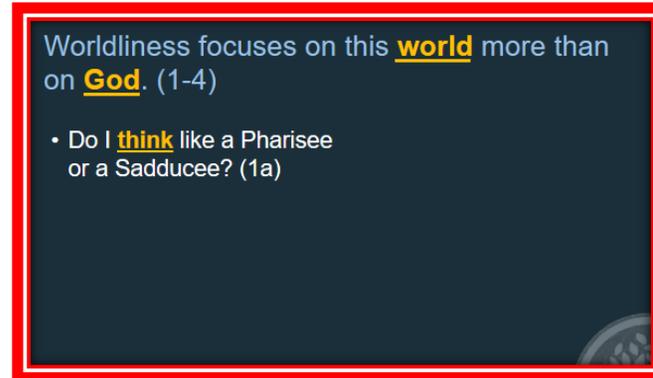
Let's examine Jesus' interaction with these religious leaders in the first four verses of **Matthew 16** to better understand how,



Worldliness focuses on this world more than on God. Anytime we are more focused on this world and its problems or promises more than we are focused on God and His power and promises, we have succumbed to the leaven of worldliness.

Now today's message is like a spiritual eye exam. I'm going to ask several questions as we walk through this text, so we can recognize and repent of any worldly influence, and then refocus our faith on the sufficiency of King Jesus.

The first question is quite convicting:



Do I think like a Pharisee or a Sadducee?

In **verse 1** we find some Pharisees and Sadducees coming to expose Jesus as the false teacher they believe Him to be.

Now it is quite shocking to see Pharisees and Sadducees working together on anything... for these two parties made up the Sanhedrin – the Jews' highest religious congress, and they were archrivals to each other.

In our current hyper-polarized political environment, we could get the sense by saying some Republicans and Democrats came to Jesus.

Because these two groups – the Pharisees and the Sadducees despised each other! But they hated Jesus even more than they hated each other, and interestingly, Jesus sees *both* of these religious parties as dangerous teachers of worldliness.

So let's first understand who these religious leaders were:

Pharisee	Sadducee
Ritualistic Conservatives	Rationalistic Liberals
Law-Keeper	Law-Breaker
Values Separation	Values Expediency
Perfectionist Legalist	Political Compromiser
Self-righteous	Self-indulgent
Ruled by Fear	Ruled by Pleasure

The Pharisees were the ritualistic conservatives. The orthodox fundamentalists. The Pharisees represented the working class, often were tradesmen themselves,⁷ and were highly regarded as the most spiritual people by the common people.

Pharisees were law-keepers, who added to God's Word layers of man-made tradition, and who valued separation from any outward defilement. The Pharisees were perfectionistic legalists, self-righteous and proud, seemingly unaware that they were completely ruled by the fear of man.

But on the other aisle of the Sanhedrin were the Sadducees. They were the rationalistic liberals. Contrary to the Pharisees, the Sadducees rejected everything that was supernatural.

The Sadducees were wealthy aristocrats,⁸ and their education caused them to see everything supernatural as

⁷ C.f. Paul was a Pharisee who was a skilled in the trade of tent-making. Acts 18:3

make-believe. They rejected the ideas of angels, the resurrection, and even the afterlife.⁹

The Sadducees constantly adjusted the rules to fit their own preferences. Their cardinal principle was expediency. Truly, the Sadducees were politicians, willing to compromise anything just to get ahead in life.

The Sadducees lived by self-indulgence, enslaved to pleasure, trying to make the most of life on earth, since they believed this life was all that there is!

So it's not surprising to see why the Pharisees and the Sadducees despised each other, is it? But what is surprising is that Jesus says *both* of these religious extremes are examples of:

Pharisee	Sadducee
Ritualistic Conservatives	Rationalistic Liberals
Law-Keeper	Law-Breaker
Values Separation	Values Expediency
Perfectionist Legalist	Political Compromiser
Self-righteous	Self-indulgent
Ruled by Fear	Ruled by Pleasure

Worldliness. We must beware of the leaven, or worldly teaching, of both the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

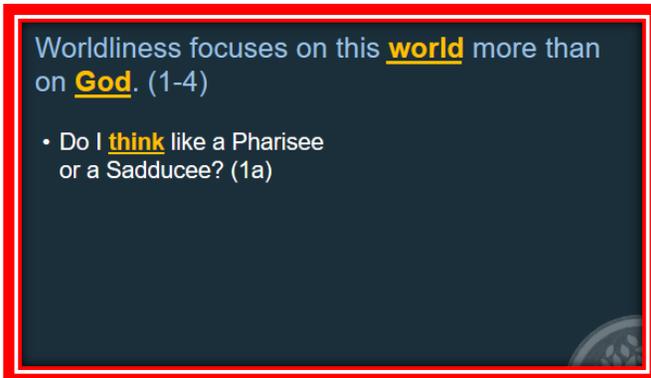
⁸ During this time in history, the Sadducees had the controlling power of Jewish religion. The high priests and chief priests were Sadducees, and the liberal Sadducees owned the entire temple economy.

⁹ Acts 23:8

If you grew up around church, you've probably been conditioned to think that religious liberals are more worldly than religious conservatives. But that's wrong!

Jesus unites both of these religious extremes as common enemies to a life of faith.

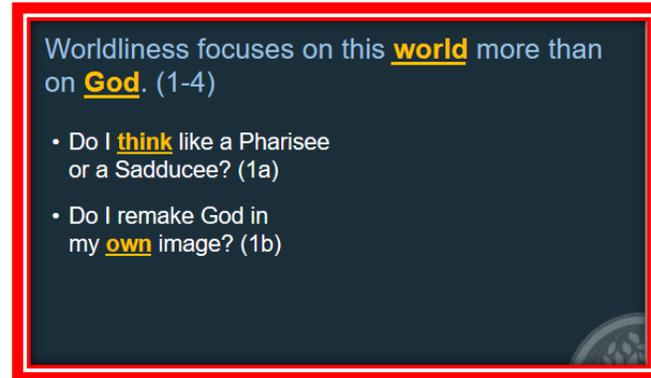
So do you think like *either* a Pharisee or a Sadducee? To the extent that we think like either one of these leaders, is the extent to which worldliness has blinded our spiritual vision.



Because both Pharisees and Sadducees focus more on this world than on God.

After all, both refused to believe obvious signs, coming in **verse 1** to discredit and find a way to deny the undeniable identity of Jesus as God.

Which leads us to our second question of our spiritual eye-exam today:



Do I try to remake God in my own image?

Are there some parts of God's character or doctrine that I simply refuse to believe because it doesn't fit my preferences about who God should be?

Jesus didn't fit the mold for the Jewish Messiah – at least not according to the Pharisees and the Sadducees. And rather than humbly reexamine their own belief systems, they outright rejected Jesus in preference for their own traditions and pleasures.

You see, the leaders in **verse 1** are standing in judgment over Jesus, rather than submitting to Him. They demand a sign in the sky to prove that He's really the Messiah – even while rejecting the countless miracles Jesus had already given to prove He has power over disease, demons, death, and all of creation itself!

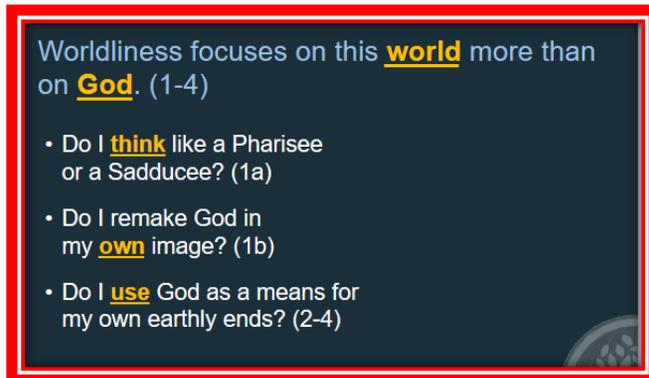
So what about you? Has your thinking been so infected by this world that you also stand in judgment over God and try to remake Him according to your own image?

Maybe it's some aspect of God's grace and forgiveness that you refuse to believe. If God is good, He would never forgive that kind of sinner!

Or perhaps it's some aspect of God's sovereignty that you despise and reject? If God is sovereign, He would never let such injustice and pain exist...

Friends, worldliness always focuses on this world than on God, and therefore seeks to remake God according to our own earth-bound understanding.

So now look at Jesus' response in **verses 2-4** while I ask the third question:



Do I merely **use** God as a means to my own earthly ends? Here, Jesus exposes the selfish motivation behind all worldliness.

The religious leaders demand a heavenly sign – some proof that Jesus is God in the heavens above.

So Jesus says, “Alright, let’s talk about evidence in the sky.” You have a common saying, “Red sky at night, sailor’s delight. Red sky in morning, sailor’s warning.”

But stop and think. Who *controls* the weather? Who controls the temperature, and wind, and barometric pressure?

God, right? Even agnostic insurance companies today betray this belief when they deem certain weather-related losses as “acts of God.”

So you are willing to use God’s work in the weather for your own earthly benefit through weather forecasting, but you are unwilling to see how God is working through His Messiah standing right in front of you for your spiritual good!

So then here’s the point of **verse 3** – your physical sight cannot help your spiritual blindness! As long as you are only interested in using God to improve your own life on earth, no amount of evidence will be enough for you to believe that Jesus is worthy of your worship!

No further sign will be given to such an evil and adulterous generation except the sign of Jonah – which we know from **chapter 12** refers to Jesus’ death and resurrection after 3 days.¹⁰

These leaders are wicked adulterers. They claim to be lovers of God, but their stiff-necked refusal to see Jesus as God shows they are actually lovers of self.

¹⁰ Matthew 12:39-40

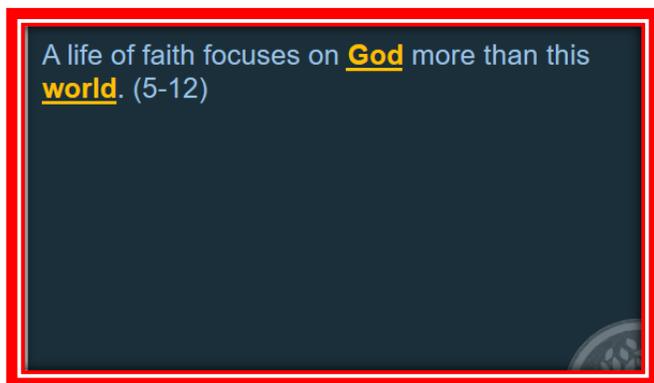
So, are you more focused on this world than on God? Do you try to tame God to make sure your religion never becomes too supernaturally radical? Do you only trust what you can physically experience and see for yourself? Is your religion just a way for you to pursue your own best life now?

The end of **verse 4** suggests a sober judgment for all worldliness. Jesus left them and departed.

Worldliness always earns the judgment of God, which leads to even greater spiritual blindness as the God of light Himself departs from you.¹¹

No wonder Jesus warns us to beware of the worldly influence of the Pharisees and the Sadducees!

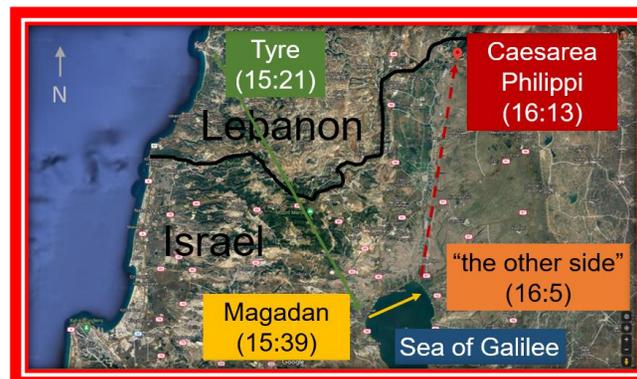
Worldliness focuses on this world more than on God. So, let's now examine the opposite truth as **verses 5-12** reveal Jesus' warning to the disciples to help them understand that,



A life of faith focuses on God more than this world.

¹¹ C.f. Romans 1:24, 26, 28
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Verse 5 and **Mark 8** tell us that when Jesus left the Sanhedrin subcommittee, He and his disciples got into their boat and started rowing Northeast.



If you piece all the accounts together, we know that Jesus and his disciples had been up in modern-day Lebanon around Tyre and Sidon, and then returned to the western shore of the Sea of Galilee where they encountered this delegation of religious leaders from Jerusalem, and now they are traveling over to the Northeast corner of the Sea from which they will eventually travel up to the northern-most tip of Israel – Caesarea Philippi.

So after this exchange with the Pharisees and the Sadducees, put yourself in the boat with Jesus and the disciples. What were the disciples thinking about in **verse 5**?

Lunch! Where are we going to get lunch when we get to shore? We only have one loaf of bread¹² –and that's not near enough for us! This rowing has made me famished... what's our plans for lunch?

¹² Mark 8:14

But in contrast, what's Jesus thinking about?

Verse 6 reveals that Jesus was thinking about the spiritual danger of the Pharisees' and Sadducees worldly focus. And so while the disciples are focused only on their stomachs, Jesus interrupts their self-focus and says,

Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Open your spiritual eyes. Be careful about the deceptive influence of an earth-bound mind.

Now the disciples are so focused on their physical hunger that in **verse 7** they begin discussing among themselves what Jesus means.

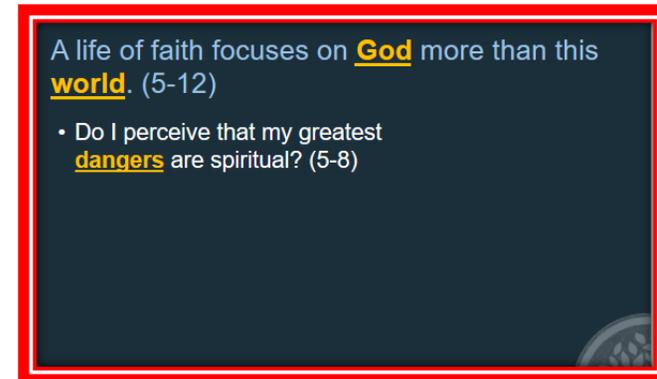
“Jesus must be warning us not to buy lunch from any Sadducee! They must've used some unkosher yeast and we must not defile ourselves!”

Church, the disciples' faith was so blinded by their focus on food that they were misunderstanding and misapplying Jesus' words.

Because listen: worldliness always twists Jesus' words to focus on external, rather than internal matters of our worshipping hearts.

The disciples were just as worldly here as the religious leaders. And so in **verse 8**, Jesus laments the smallness of their faith, asking why they keep on endlessly interpreting His Words from a merely physical or worldly perspective.

A life of faith focuses on God more than this world, so let's ask ourselves:



Do we perceive that our greatest dangers are spiritual?

Or, like the disciples, are we so concerned with whatever physical threat is facing us, that we become blind to what Jesus is trying to teach us?

Church, living through a pandemic...during an election year... means we are constantly tempted towards worldliness.

Some of us perceive our greatest dangers are political. We become consumed by the fear that the wrong party will get into power. But such worldliness blinds us to all that God is doing to bring about His kingdom purposes in us, and through us, for His eternal glory.

Some of us perceive our greatest dangers are medical. And so avoiding the danger of physical sickness becomes the ruling orientation of our lives, rather than loving others for the glory of God.

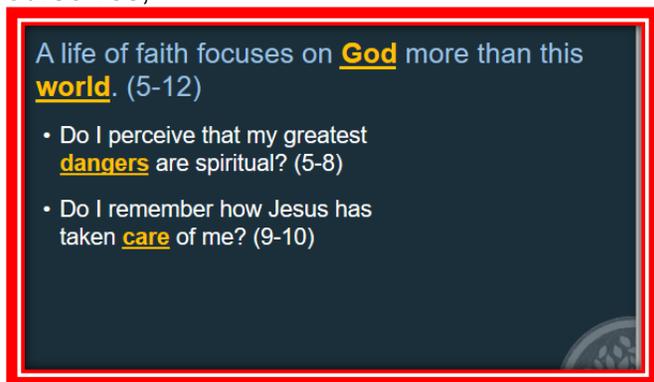
Some of us perceive our greatest dangers are financial, so we become blind to the biblical reality of God's faithful provision for His children.

Church – we walk by faith, not by sight.¹³ This world is not our home. So Jesus asks in **verse 9**,

Do you not yet perceive? Don't you realize that the Spirit of Jesus Himself is with us? That everything earthly is temporary? And that whatever has the power to blind me to my joyful sufficiency in Christ – that is the greatest threat to both my present and eternal joy!

Jesus asks His disciples 5 different questions in **verses 8-11**. He's trying to refocus their attention back on who Jesus is and what He has done.

In effect, these questions should cause us to ask ourselves,



Do I remember how Jesus has taken care of me?

¹³ 2 Corinthians 5:7

¹⁴ Interestingly a different Greek word for “basket” is consistently used throughout all Matthew’s references to these miraculous feeding. Every reference to the feeding of 5,000 Jewish families uses a word for “basket” that refers to a Jewish man’s individual food basket, like a personal lunch

Whenever my stomach growls, or my finances or health fail, do I remember how Jesus has taken care of me in the past?

Notice how in **verses 9-10** Jesus focuses on the leftovers after both feeding miracles. Because the 12 leftover lunch baskets after feeding 5,000 Jewish families, and the 7 leftover large baskets¹⁴ after feeding the 4,000 Gentile families both proved that God will always take care of you whenever you are taking care of others in His name. It doesn't matter if you are serving Jews or Gentiles – you can never out give Jesus!

So never lose sight of your God-given purpose as Jesus' disciples on earth. Jesus sent us by His Spirit to live as His ambassadors on earth. To love and comfort the broken. To witness of His forgiveness and grace. To serve and love the unlovable and the poor.

So fuel your faith church! God's children never need to be anxious about their food, or their clothing...for God is our Father!¹⁵ He will always provide what is best for us from the perspective of eternity as we are serving in His Name!

Only when you focus on God more than this world, will you be able to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, believing that all your physical needs will be added at the right time for God's greatest glory.¹⁶

box. But every reference to the feeding of 4,000 Gentile families uses a word for “basket” that refers to a large basket used during harvest, etc.

¹⁵ Matthew 6:25-34

¹⁶ Matthew 6:33

So Jesus repeats again his warning that the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees is a threat to our souls.

The leaven, or yeast, of the religious leaders refers to their teaching. It's the teaching of worldliness. All teaching – especially that which dresses up in religious clothing – that focuses more on this world than on God.

Therefore the last question of our spiritual eye exam today is,

A life of faith focuses on **God** more than this **world**. (5-12)

- Do I perceive that my greatest **dangers** are spiritual? (5-8)
- Do I remember how Jesus has taken **care** of me? (9-10)
- Do I understand that **God's** wisdom is superior to human wisdom? (11-12)

Do I understand that **God's** wisdom is superior to human wisdom?

The human wisdom of materialism, and the human wisdom of self-righteousness will always tempt the human soul. But these worldly influences are contrary to a life of faith.

Therefore, the exhortation for Christ's disciples today is to live by faith and focus more on God and His kingdom than this world.

¹⁷ Grateful for Keith Green lyrics to "Make My Life a Prayer"
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Main Point

Worldliness will blind us from seeing God's kingdom realities.

BEHOLD Jesus

After all, **Worldliness will blind us from seeing God's kingdom realities.** Worldliness makes it hard to really see because my eyes are only on me.¹⁷

Therefore, this morning this Scripture urges us all to,

Application

See your entire life through the lens of faith in Christ.

BEHOLD Jesus

See your entire life through the lens of faith in Christ.

Only the Spirit of God can give you the spiritual sight of Elisha so you can see the fiery horsemen and chariots securing God's eternal purposes for you in the midst of your trouble.¹⁸ Only the Spirit of God can open your

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, 4:6

spiritual understanding to realize that our Heavenly Father is trustworthy during both lack and plenty.¹⁹

So this morning, as we continue to navigate this spiritually dangerous season together, I urge us to look to Jesus! See your entire life through the lens of your faith in Christ!

Since Jesus' mercy on the cross was sufficient to pay for the penalty of all your sins – then there is no need for you to wallow in condemnation or shame in your life.

Yes, you will fail, and there will be times when you fall back into sin. But when you have fallen, see your own sinfulness through the lens of faith in Christ. The righteous fall seven times but keep getting up again!²⁰

Christ promised to present you blameless before God's presence at the end of time.²¹ Allow His exceeding great and precious promises to motivate your daily fight against your sin. See your entire life through the lens of your faith in Christ's finished work which has justified your soul, even now is sanctifying your soul, and will someday glorify your soul in the perfection of Christ's presence Himself!

Then, not only see your sin through the lens of faith, but also see your suffering through the lens of faith in Christ.

Remember our Heavenly Father never wastes any suffering on earth from eternity's perspective. So view earthly suffering as the grace-gift from God that it truly

¹⁹ Philippians 4:11-13

²⁰ Proverbs 24:16

²¹ Jude 24

is!²² All physical suffering now is uncomfortable and painful yes... but it is chained to an eternal weight of glory that far surpasses anything this world could ever offer us!²³

So look to the things that are yet unseen! Fix your attention on things above, not on things of this earth!²⁴ For through our faith in Christ we have died, and our life is now hidden in God.

May God's Spirit open our eyes to see our entire life – all our sin and all our suffering – through the lens of faith in Christ.



Let's pray.

<<All I Have is Christ!>>

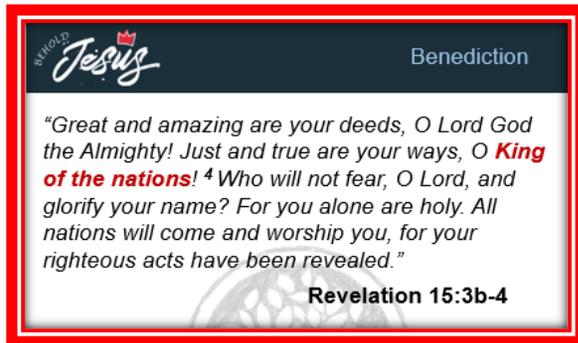
Remember to take advantage of the online Downloads and links!

Let's pray our benediction together as we dismiss.

²² Philippians 1:29

²³ 2 Corinthians 4:17-18

²⁴ Colossians 3:1-3



Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.
Revelation 15:3b-4

Recommended Resources on Spiritual Blindness:

- 2 Kings 6:15-23
- Mark 8:11-21
- John 1:9-11; 3:19-21; 12:37-43
- Romans 1:20-21
- 1 Corinthians 2:14
- 2 Corinthians 4:4
- Ephesians 1:18; 4:18

- <https://www.gotquestions.org/sign-of-Jonah.html>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-loving-meaning-of-the-leftovers>
- <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/more-than-enough>

- *Worldliness*, CJ Mahaney
- *Total Truth*, Nancy Pearcey
- *Right Thinking in a World gone Wrong*, John MacArthur

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Compare Matthew 16:1-4 with 12:38-42. What did Jesus mean by referencing the sign Jonah?
2. Read 2 Timothy 2:13. How have you seen Jesus' faithfulness towards you even at times when your faith has failed?
3. Review Matthew 16:8-11. How many questions does Jesus ask his disciples in these verses? What common point is Jesus trying to make with these questions?
4. Read Matthew 16:23. How did worldliness influence Peter's response to Jesus' revelation of His cross? How does worldliness impact our reaction to the teaching of Matthew 16:24-26?
5. Review Matthew 16:2-3. Who ultimately controls the weather? Why is it so ironic that unbelievers spend so much time forecasting the acts of God in weather while simultaneously rejecting all evidences of His work in this age?
6. Read Ephesians 1:18 (C.f. Matthew 13:15-16; Acts 26:18). Pray that God would miraculously open your spiritual eyes to believe more in the goodness and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Confess any ways you have compartmentalized your life, and effectively lived with Jesus amnesia.