

Guarding your Heart - Blinders of the Heart

John 12:20-50

Sunday, 15th January, 2017

We pick up from where we began last Sunday morning. The central theme is found in proverbs 4: 23

- **Above all else, *guard your heart*, for everything you do flows from it.**

and this morning we look at the sort of thing that blinds our hearts. Which is a bit of a mixed metaphor but hopefully it will make sense.

Last Sunday the three points Oli made were

- **Tap into the pure source of Jesus**
- **Take care what you let into your heart**
- **Test what comes out of your heart**

This morning our objective is best described by Ephesians 1:18 –

- I pray that *the eyes of your heart may be enlightened* in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,

We will examine the very words of Jesus in

- **John 12:20-50**

so let's begin by reading God's word.

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. 'Sir,' they said, 'we would like to see Jesus.' ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

²⁷ 'Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour"? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!'

Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.' ²⁹ The crowd that was there and

heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

³⁰ Jesus said, ‘This voice was for your benefit, not mine.

³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

³⁴ The crowd spoke up, ‘We have heard from the Law that the Messiah will remain for ever, so how can you say, “The Son of Man must be lifted up”? Who is this “Son of Man”?’

³⁵ Then Jesus told them, ‘You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. ³⁶ Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.’ When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

Belief and unbelief among the Jews

³⁷ Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfil the word of Isaiah the prophet:

‘Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?’

³⁹ For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

⁴⁰ ‘He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their hearts,
so they can neither see with their eyes,
nor understand with their hearts,
nor turn – and I would heal them.’

⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him.

⁴² Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved human praise more than praise from God.

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried out, ‘Whoever believes in me does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me.

⁴⁵ The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

⁴⁷ ‘If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸ There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; the very words I have spoken will condemn them at the last day. ⁴⁹ For I did not speak on my own, but the Father who sent me commanded me to say all that I have spoken. ⁵⁰ I know that his command leads to eternal life.

So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.’

In this passage we have a spectrum of responses to the key question of the universe, **who is this Jesus?** If you want the eyes of your hearts opened then it begins with seeing who Jesus is.

We have, in this passage, those who wanted to meet him, get his autograph, enthuse about him. There were those who genuinely could not get their heads round this idea that Jesus was to be crucified. There were those who saw miracles and simply failed to see that Jesus was at the very least extraordinary. Some believed but were cowed by the authorities into silence. Then finally we have Jesus proclaiming himself, saviour by grace alone through faith alone and the obverse of that which is that those who do not believe and receive are condemned.

Spiritual blindness comes in a number of forms and we need to be alert to it. The most dangerous form is to think we can see while not examining what Jesus actually said.

There are 6 things I want to look at this morning. They are:

- **Sir, we would see Jesus**

– Jesus talks of his death

- **Father, Save me from this hour?**

– Jesus was here for this hour.

- **The Messiah will remain forever**

- How do you interpret the Law about the Messiah and the Son of Man living forever and Jesus saying he was to die?

- **they did not believe him**

- Even after all the miracles because they were blind.

- **for they loved human praise more than praise from God.**

- Some believed but did not proclaim it for fear.

- **I have come into the world as a light**

- Hearing, believing, obeying.

- **Sir, we would see Jesus**

When I were a lad we visited Cullompton. It has a fine parish church dating back to the 15th Century. On the steps up to the pulpit was this simple line -

Sir, we would see Jesus. It is a challenge to us all not just the person in the pulpit. Does your family see Jesus, your workmates or your friends? The purpose of the church and SRCF as part of the church is to reveal Jesus to our community. But not just by evangelistic activity but by living out Jesus where you are. Our world needs Jesus, do you believe that? Then reveal him by the way you live by the narrative of your life and sometimes by the words you say.

But for that to happen, you must engage with the real Jesus. We must know him for ourselves and live in the light of his Holy Spirit permeating our very beings. We cannot open people's eyes if our understanding is one based on your own construction of what he should be like. The Jesus who is speaking in this passage is a very uncomfortable person. He makes outrageous claims and, at the same time, is the victim of the world around him.

The people in the passage were probably totally floored by Jesus' answer.

'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

It is not clear who this was addressed to but even the disciples would have been taken aback. The question of who Jesus is centres on the cross. The expectation was that Jesus would be a military revolutionary, do the terrorist thing on the Romans and set up a new kingdom of God for the Jews to dominate their neighbours. The Greeks may have been looking for a fine philosophy to live by. Jesus hits them between the eyes by declaring a very different kingdom. One where he suffers on a cross for our sin.

And we are not excluded from the battle. These are some of the most challenging verses in the Bible. And here we are on a Sunday Morning, with an agenda of persecution, suffering and death, not only for our Lord and Saviour but for us as well. This is not some nice comfortable 'Guarding the heart' by thinking nice thoughts and being thoroughly versed in the Bible. It is about exposing ourselves to ridicule, persecution and suffering. You want to guard your heart, says Jesus, then risk everything for me. So readjust your thinking about

the persecuted church. They are not the unlucky ones, they have the privilege of sharing in the suffering, and they live out this passage for them the kingdom of God is literally suffering and rejection. They know what following Jesus actually costs. Too often we stand our gospel on end. Jesus calls us to follow him and his journey had one direction only, to end on the cross.

At this point Jesus breaks off and reflects on his destiny.

- **Save me from this hour?**

Jesus could have lived forever, if he was God. And yet he rejects the “I want to live forever” mantra so built into our age. We think death is a disaster, Jesus sees it as a victory. The cause of his death was crucifixion. But here and In the Garden of Gethsemane we realise that it was a free choice of his.

So much of our thinking is about staying alive; this idea that death is a step forward takes our breath away. But open our eyes to this transforms us. Death is not an end but a beginning. It is an opening into heaven itself for those who have trusted Jesus. Nobody likes dying but death happens to everyone. Our good news is that the end of our lives, however painful and difficult that is

is as full of hope as the beginning. Jesus has conquered death by facing death himself.

- **“the Messiah will remain for ever”?**

Hardly surprising then that the crowd used its biblical knowledge to challenge this line of thinking. There is a blindness to what Messiahship was all about. It was wrapped up in what they wanted a Messiah to be, rather than what he came to be. The problem was that death followed by resurrection was not a possibility in their thinking so they interpreted the scriptures by their own vision of the future.

This a a constant hazard for us. To read the Bible selectively, looking for the bits that are comforting and about the blessings and leaving out the challenges. The Jews of Jesus day had a complex well researched understanding of the messiah and to the scriptures they added their own ideas about how they would benefit. The passages of judgement and of suffering and of calls to repentance were sidelined. And certainly a dying Messiah was not part of the theology of the day. The challenge here is to check out the revelation and engage with the uncomfortable bits of the teachings of Jesus and his disciples and the rest of the scriptures. We cannot afford to blindly follow our

own interpretation without allowing for the uncompromising challenges to our lives. We like our traditions and the clutter of denominations demonstrates our preference for safe man-made solutions to questions of what is worship? What is authority in the church? But the problem goes deeper. Like the Religious leadership of Jesus' time we are selective about which bits of the Bible are taken to shape our lives.

- **For example, James 1:27**

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

But we like to think that a morning quiet time and a worship service on a Sunday morning is our religion. We struggle to take practical steps to look after the weak and vulnerable in our own church. We prefer to think the problem does not exist. As to keeping ourselves unspotted by the world we are fully immersed in the cheap lies of the gutter press, the misinformation on the internet, our world view is more shaped by the society around us than the word of God. I am asking no more than we read the words of Jesus and the rest of the Bible as words of life, which they are and challenge every thought

we have in relation to the revealed word of God. That will have its difficulties. And maybe sometimes we will be less dogmatic and certainly more grace-filled.

- **they still would not believe in him**

When Jesus arrived in Capernaum proclaiming the Kingdom of God has come he demonstrated the kingdom by a whole variety of miracles. The natural cynicism of the existing leadership should have given way to grudging respect and then the dawning realisation that this was the Messiah of the scriptures. Instead they clung onto their cynicism by finding fault over Sabbath observance, over lack of fasting, over association with tax collectors and prostitutes. They found where Jesus didn't fit their own concept of Messiah and condemned him for failing to measure up to their standards of religious observance.

Sometimes, you know, we wish God would break out in miraculous ways in and around our church. Surely then people would be turning up in large numbers to hear and see what God is doing. The evidence is that they would turn up, particularly Christians who run from one excitement to another. But the Kingdom of God was proclaimed by Jesus with signs following and the majority still failed to

recognise him. They chased him to see the miracle of food creation after the feeding of the 5000 but they were not hungry for him.

John goes back to some very familiar words in Isaiah. Isaiah was called to speak to deaf ears. Listen to Isaiah 6: 8-10

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'

And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'

9 He said, 'Go and tell this people:

*"Be ever hearing, but never understanding;
be ever seeing, but never perceiving."*

10

*Make the heart of this people calloused;
make their ears dull
and close their eyes.*

*Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.'*

Isaiah was in a position of real influence, with the ear of the King but still his message was largely ignored. The First of the quotations from Isaiah comes from the middle of the fourth of the Servant Songs – Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12 which prophecies the suffering and death of Jesus in some detail.

*'Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been
revealed?'*

What is happening right here was that the Jews were rejecting the Messiah because they did not want to see that he was the promised one. Read the servant song of Isaiah 52-53 and you would be in no doubt that Jesus was destined to suffer and die for the sins of the world. But they were blind to that because it was too far outside their comfort zone of a saviour who would overthrow the pagan Romans and establish a Jewish kingdom of God on earth.

But some did believe .

- **for they loved human praise more than praise from God.**

Some believed but did not proclaim it for fear.

Before you jump in with judgemental attitudes, I can only ask whether you have spoken to your family or your neighbours or you friends about your faith? These disciples had a real tangible threat – to be isolated from their community, disowned by their family, lose their ability to do business and so on. Being put out of the synagogue carried some if not all of those consequences. Yet John says

they loved human praise more than praise from God.

The Bible is uncomfortable. Here we are challenged whether we are more concerned with what our friends, neighbours, workmates and family think of us than what our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ thinks of us. I am ashamed to say that much of my witness has been muted because I am probably more afraid of human criticism than I am keen on divine approval.

- **I have come into the world as a light,**

46: I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

This is a major theme in Jesus' ministry. John spells it out here, in John 1:12

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world

In John 3:19

This is the verdict: light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so

that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

in John 8:12,

Jesus said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'

and the antithesis in John 9:41

Jesus, speaking after he had healed a man born blind, said, 'If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.'

If you want to see, you have to have the light of Jesus to illuminate your life.

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord **1490**