

Sermon, May 7, 2023
Acts 7:55-60; John 14:1-14
“Faithful Followers: Eyes on the Prize”
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I keep this pair of sunglasses in my car when I am driving on a sunny day, or if I'm driving especially at dusk and the sun starts coming directly into the car. Part of that is for comfort reasons. But another reason, probably the main reason is for safety. I don't want to drive if I can't see clearly. I need to see the cars in front of me or alongside me. Driving is difficult because the action of driving changes every second, doesn't it? It's not static, cars move up, back, adjust speeds.

I want to be able to see all those things clearly. Sometimes, especially if it's dusk and the sun is at the wrong angle, you have to concentrate to tell when a traffic light has changed colors.

Something like sunglasses can really help cut down on the glare and make it easier to see. And they have all sorts of glasses that do this today. You have some that not only can cut down on glare and make it easier for your eyes, but can supposedly bring everything into a sharper focus, make it clearer, you can see everything around you perfectly. They have some you can slip on at night that will cut down on the glare you might get from another car's headlights or the reflection if it's raining. It's marvelous what they can do. We were talking a week or so ago at The Gathering on Wednesday that they have glasses now that can

help you see colors more clearly if you struggle with that. They are all designed to help us to be able to see more clearly. They help us see the world around us for what it is.

That may be a little bit of the thinking behind the cult classic Science Fiction movie *They Live*. I'm not endorsing the movie, but it has an interesting premise. In the movie, because its science fiction, aliens have taken over the world and they look like us, everything seems great, everyone is happy, but they are draining us of our resources or our money, everything. And once the planet is used up, they move on.

In the movie, the hero discovers or attains a pair of sunglasses that, as sunglasses do, help him see the world for what it is. He sees the aliens for what they are. He sees that in every commercial, every billboard, are subliminal messages calling the people to obey. When he takes the sunglasses off, he sees the world as they want him to see it. When he puts them on, he sees the world as it actually is, and seeing the world, seeing what is real, changes the course of his life.

How well do you see the world? How well do you see what's around you? And has that vision changed how you live your life? This morning, we continue our series on Faithful Followers, asking ourselves what does it mean, Biblically, to be faithful followers of Jesus? What does it mean not just to try to live by Jesus' teaching, but to follow the Living Lord? And what does it mean to do that faithfully, being able to consistently follow Jesus not just when it is easy for us?

One of the things we discover when we begin to be faithful flowers of Jesus and He begins to, as we said last week, turn us right side up and reorient our lives, is to give us a clear vision. It's a bit like God giving us those sunglasses taking away the glare and helping us to see things as they really are.

So, what do we see? Our Scriptures, both of them, tell us when we become a faithful follower of Jesus, we begin to live with a clear vision of heaven and of eternity. Never underestimate the power of having a vision of eternity.

So how does having a clear vision of eternity, having our eyes set on the truth of heaven, change our daily lives? First, it gives us a proper perspective of life and how we should live it. Most of us go through life with a sense of something missing, something we long for, that somehow we don't fit in. There is a longing for something we don't find anywhere. You see, we are eternal creatures, yet we are stuck in a temporal world.

This is the message we find in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. In the book, the author goes through life looking for something to give his life meaning, to make him happy, and everything in the end fails him because it doesn't last. Like traffic, it's constantly moving and making adjustments, is happening all the time, and happiness seems fleeting. He begins the book by saying *I have looked for solutions to my*

longing for happiness and joy, and everything I look to was like a puff of air, felt and then dissipated as if it were a dream.

By the end of the book, He realizes that it's because his joy and happiness were never meant to come from the things of this earth. And it's OK if they don't last, because he is bound for something more. He finds his joy in the hope of the eternal. But what he finds is that it actually increases the joy he can find in this world. When you realize that things don't last and they aren't responsible for your happiness, then you can enjoy them for what they are they and the happiness they bring. When you have your eyes set on the hope of eternity, you will begin to find you can enjoy what the world offers more, not less, because it's in its proper place.

It gives us hope when life takes a sudden change in direction. We've said it many times, life isn't easy. Everyone has struggles, and no one's life turns out exactly how we think it will. But when we have our eyes on eternity, we have hope because we know that our problems, our difficulties, our sorrows, in the end, will not be victorious.

When our eyes are focused on eternity, it frees us from having a troubled heart. I see so many Christians who carry around with them a troubled heart. Their lives are full of worry and anxiety they feel over absolutely everything in life. But look at what Jesus says to the disciples in our passage from John. *Do not let your hearts be troubled.* This is just before the betrayal and arrest of Jesus. Jesus says *don't let your hearts be troubled, look to what I have planned for you. In the end, you will be with Me. In the end, every pain, every problem, every worry will pass away, it will not follow you into My kingdom.* Hold on. Oh my goodness and the promise, the promise of an eternity of unending fellowship with Jesus? To be going back, in essence, to Eden? How can our hearts be troubled when we know this is what God has for us?

It gives us a holy boldness to proclaim the Gospel. One of the things I find when a person has their eyes set clearly on a vision of heaven is that they are unafraid to live out their faith. I mean, what's the worst that can happen? Someone laughs at you, derides you, ignores you. That will all pass away. Look at Stephen boldly proclaiming the Gospel, why? Because the sky opens and he sees Jesus the King of kings, the Lord of lords, sitting on the throne of heaven. The rocks are falling, the blood spilt, but Stephen, Stephen sees Jesus. Who do you see in your life?

I believe that hope, that vision of Heaven, is at the heart of Stephen's extraordinary ability to forgive. This first martyr of the faith forgives those who stoned him. How can he do this? Because he can see Jesus on the throne. All they are doing in the end is sending him where he was destined to go, to join all the saints gathered around the feet of Jesus. And it was so glorious all he wanted was that these others be able to join him. One wonders how that must have affected the Pharisee Paul who held their cloaks.

Where are your eyes set? Have you found yourself longing for something to give you joy, something you have been longing for? Look to Jesus calling you to eternity. Is your heart troubled this morning? Let go of your worries, leave them here, they will pass, Jesus is on the throne. Has God placed on your heart a need, a desire to share the Good News? Be bold. The stones and insults thrown at you will not last. Jesus sits on the throne. Can you forgive? You don't have to carry that hurt and betrayal with you Jesus is on the throne. Do you see Him clearly? Amen.