

## “The Problem with Two Masters”

October 14, 2018

*Treasure series*

### **SHOW MEDIA:** *Treasure Week 2*

We can get caught up with language when it comes to Jesus. We can downplay his words sometimes to make them fit what we want to hear instead of hearing what he actually says. Jesus talks about money and the Kingdom of God more than anything else, and he is straight and to the point.

There’s no skirting the issue: *You can’t serve two masters*. There’s no getting around what Jesus says here. To use the word “master” implies a relationship where we don’t have total control. Let’s be honest: we don’t want to be mastered by anyone or anything; **we** want to master things. We want control. We want to be the master of our own lives.

So to hear Jesus clearly say that we can’t serve two masters is a challenge, to say the least. And he tells us exactly which two - God or money. We have to choose. We can’t have a divided heart. In other words, if there are competing allegiances in our hearts, something will be destroyed. We can’t make it work; division leads to conflict where there’s constant strife - or one side ultimately wins.

Of course, we want to serve God first! How is it possible that money can be a master of us? But we know it is. We see it every day in news stories that make headlines where money is at the root of people lying, cheating, and stealing. Scandals are covered up with payoffs. We’ve heard the line: “Follow the money.” We know people whose lives are ruined by “get rich quick” promises. And we know the reality of people working to pay off debt - money that they’ve already spent even before it was in their hands. Frederick Buechner puts it this way: “There are people who use up their entire lives making money so they can enjoy the lives they have entirely used up.”

Maybe Buechner’s words sound harsh, but I think he’s onto something. Money can quickly become a singular focus, especially when we’re struggling. If you’ve never felt it, perhaps you’re the exception to the rule. Most of us have had moments or seasons when our financial situations were uncertain.

I never experienced my parents fighting about money. I don’t remember them worrying about it. But as I hear them talk now, there were times when money was tight. And those times were difficult and stressful.

We’re talking about treasure and the relationship between faith and money, but it’s really about much deeper things. Jesus cares about our hearts and calls us to be fully devoted to him. And even if we want to lead with our hearts, hoping that our

treasure will follow accordingly, we have to hear Jesus - that our hearts usually follow where our treasure is.

Our hearts follow where we've invested - whether it's time, energy, or money. If we look at our calendar or our checkbook, we might find some places where we're divided. We've said "yes" to too many commitments. We've swiped our cards too many times or written too many checks or used up what we have. And in the end, we're not satisfied by doing more or spending more.

Sometimes the desire for money gets in the way of our relationship with God. Certainly there are worthy endeavors that we work for, but we can't allow them to push God to the side. In Jacob Armstrong's words, "We may not kick Jesus out, but we sometimes move him over." Jesus warns against serving two masters; we might struggle with even more than two!

The story is told of Sam Houston, hero of Texas history, who gave his life to Christ later in life and asked to be baptized. He was taken down to a little country stream, and the pastor said, "General Houston, you should take your glasses off because I am going to immerse you in water." There also were some papers in General Houston's pocket, so he took those out as well.

Then, just as he was getting ready to go into the water, the pastor noticed that General Houston still had his wallet in his pants. He said, "Well, General, you might want to take that wallet out of your pants. It is going to get wet."

Houston responded, "If there is any part of me that needs baptizing, it is my wallet." So Houston was baptized, wallet and all.

Houston had a sense of what we know is true - that our relationship with money can be a tough part of life to give to God. Reformation leader Martin Luther said, "There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, mind, and the purse." And someone said that our wallets are the last part of our lives to be converted.

*You can't serve both God and money.* So what is the proper role of money in our lives as people who seek to follow Jesus? How do we live faithfully?

Perhaps one way to start is to ask ourselves if money has become an idol for us. Does money receive the energy and resources that should belong to God? Are we serving the gift of money rather than God who is the Giver of that gift?

I invite you to see a few slides that offer perspective:

**SHOW SLIDES:**

1. One man's junk is another man's treasure. (with rummage sale coming up!)
2. Money is a terrible master, but an excellent servant. P. T. Barnum
3. Money often costs too much. Ralph Waldo Emerson

Barnum's words are a good match to Jesus' words. Money can serve God's purposes, but we can't allow it to become what controls us. Where will we offer our attention and devotion? How do we order our lives so that money is a tool we use and a blessing we share? When we're trying to serve God and money and maybe even more than those, and trying to divide our hearts among them, we're torn. That's not God's intention for us. God asks for our full devotion.

How does it work when someone asks us about why Jesus is important to us? Perhaps we don't use the title "Master" for Jesus; maybe "Lord" or "King" is a better word for you. Whatever word we use for our relationship with Jesus, we must consider what it means to be devoted to him. We pray. We worship with others in community. We serve others in the name of Jesus. We tell others about Jesus. We show his love in our actions. We give out of God's abundance to us. We can have a healthy relationship with money - having it and recognizing it as a gift of God of which we're stewards (managers).

That giving part is sometimes the most difficult, but it's absolutely important. I'm praying as we walk together through this series that God is working in our hearts to guide us in generosity. I'm praying that a part of that is leading us to make faith commitments that demonstrate that Jesus is Lord. It's not just about supporting the mission and ministry of the church here and around the world, though that's important. This is about our hearts. Taking time to consider our giving in all areas - time, energy, and money - matters.

One of the basics of our faith is that we are God's good creation, and God calls us to be faithful stewards of God's gifts in our lives. This series is about how we invest our whole lives, and a part of that is looking at the relationship between faith and money. Jesus talked about money and the Kingdom of God more than anything else.

Here these verses from *The Message*:

<sup>24</sup> "You can't worship two gods at once. Loving one god, you'll end up hating the other. Adoration of one feeds contempt for the other. You can't worship God and Money both.

There are some pastors who would tell you that they really don't like talking about giving or money. But we can't be faithful in our relationship with Jesus and not talk about it! It's a big part of our lives and a part of how we grow in deeper faith and trust. And it matters that we put money in its proper place in our lives - not as what we serve, but as a tool for ministry. We don't give because the church needs money; we give as a response to God's generosity. We make a budget so that we can be faithful

stewards of God's gifts. We want to be faithful as individuals, and we want to be faithful as a congregation.

In my role as a pastor, I'm called to love and serve God. I'm also called to preach and teach - and encourage spiritual formation. And a part of that is looking at our lives - our whole lives - and how we give faithfully and generously. There's nothing to add to Jesus' words because they are clear: you and I *can't serve both God and money*.

**SHOW SLIDES:**

4. You must gain control over your money or the lack of it will forever control you. Dave Ramsey

5. What money can buy (on one slide)

I want to encourage you to consider what it means for you to serve God. Last week, we heard the challenge to consider where we feel the disconnect between what we truly treasure and how we invest our time, energy, and money. It's a difficult thing - to admit that what we value the most doesn't always receive the most and best from us. And it's difficult to consider saying "no" to some things in order to say "yes" to God.

You wouldn't be here if your relationship with God wasn't important to you. But there's also a sense of what can be - how God can help us get our hearts and treasure more in line with God's purposes.

If you've been making a faith commitment for many years, I hope you'll continue. If you've never made a faith commitment, I hope you'll start. May God help us order our lives so that Jesus is Lord and everything else falls where it should - and we're standing on firm ground.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE: I want to serve you, God, not money...**