

Treasure, Week 2

THE PROBLEM WITH TWO MASTERS Matthew 6:24

Freedom isn't free. For us to enjoy the rights and privileges that come with being Americans, somebody had to pay a price. On Wednesday of this week, we recognize a special group of people who sacrificed to keep us free—our military veterans.

Now, speaking of veterans: Imagine a sailor on a US Navy ship. One day he's sitting there and an officer comes along and says, "Sailor, get up and swab the deck!" (That's Navy talk for "mop the floor.") So the sailor gets a mop and starts mopping. Then another officer of the same rank comes along and says, "Sailor, put down that mop and polish the portholes!" (That's Navy talk for "wash the windows.") So the sailor puts down the mop, grabs a rag and some Windex, and gets to work on the portholes.

Then the first guy comes back through and says, "What are you doing polishing the portholes? I told you to swab the deck!" The sailor goes back to that task; but then the second fellow comes back and says, "Put down that mop and do what I told you!"

What's going to happen to this poor sailor? He will go crazy!

And that's the problem with two masters.

Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other..." (Matthew 6:24 a).

The first thing to notice about this Scripture: *Jesus wants to be your master!*

The earliest Christian creed was, "Jesus is Lord." We still reflect that in the Apostles' Creed when we say, "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only son, our LORD." It's in our membership ritual, when we ask, "Do you profess Jesus Christ as your Savior ... and promise to serve him as your LORD."

The word *Lord* does not mean somebody you admire, or somebody whose teachings you respect. The word Lord means "Absolute authority, owner." And that's who Jesus wants to be in your life.

Jesus does not want to be part of your life. He wants to BE your life!

Go back to our veterans: They understand what it means to live under authority. If you're in the military, you have a commanding officer. And you do what that officer says. If the officer says, "Do that," you do that. If the officer says, "Go there," you go there.

We rank-and-file Christians need to learn something from our veterans. Jesus is our commanding officer. We live under his authority.

Jesus wants to be your master!

That's the first thing to see from today's Scripture. And the second is the answer to this question: **Who or what is the main competitor for Jesus being Lord of your life?** Who or what has the biggest potential for coming into conflict with your commitment to Christ?

The answer might surprise you. Look at the Scripture again:

"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matthew 6:24).

And that's the second thing to notice about this Scripture: *You cannot serve both God and money.*

Now, why does Jesus single out money as the enemy? Why not the devil (or evil, or Satan)? Why didn't he say, "You cannot serve both God and Satan?"

Here's why: Because Satan is too obvious. You know you can't serve God and Satan. But money, on the other hand: Money's tricky – money is insidious. LISTEN:

You want to earn money so you can feed your family. That's a good thing.
You want to save money for the future. That's a good thing.
You want to invest money so you can retire. That's a good thing.

But then what happens is, at some point you don't notice, you cross an emotional line and those good things become *the main thing*. Money becomes your main motivation. It becomes your main source of safety and security. And before you know it, without you meaning for this to happen, money creeps into your heart and takes the place of God.

Jesus is saying is that money has the potential to do that more than anything else in life. Why? Because MONEY TOUCHES EVERYTHING. Think about it. If I need food, I've got to have money. If I need clothes, I've got to have money. If I need to go somewhere, need to put gas in my car, I've got to have money. Nothing gets done without money. It touches everything.

Now, I'm not saying money is bad. Money is a tool. A tool is not good or bad in and of itself. It's what you do with it that can be judged good or bad. Consider a hammer. I can use it to build a building, or repair a roof, or fix a deck. Or, I can use it to kill somebody.

The tool is just a tool – it's what you do with it that's good or bad. But I can put a hammer back in the tool box and forget about it. Money's not like that. Money is everywhere. I use it *all the time*. I need it *all the time*. It's with me *all the time*.

And that means that all the time, I've got to be wary of whether this tool is becoming more to me than just a tool. Am I using it to glorify God, or to fulfill my selfish desires? Is it creeping into my heart and taking the place of God? I've got to be wary. *All the time*. Jesus said, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed!" (Luke 12:15).

That's why Jesus said to store your treasure in heaven. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). Jesus knew that there's a connection between my treasure and my heart. If I want my heart to be in the right place, then I need to make sure my treasure is in the right place.

Now, A WAY – not the only way, but a very important way – to keep money in its proper place is to practice the spiritual discipline of TITHING.

The word Tithing means "a tenth." So the practice of tithing means giving the first tenth of my income to God as an act of worship – as a way of recognizing that everything I have comes from God and belongs to God

Some will say, "Tithing?! That's an Old Testament law. We're Christians! We're not living under the law."

Let me say two things. 1-You're right, we don't live under the law, so you don't have to do this. 2- You're also right that the New Testament does not tell you to tithe.

You know what the New Testament says? "Give *everything*."

- Jesus says, "...those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples." –Luke 14:33 NIV
- Paul says, "...offer your bodies as a living sacrifice..." –Romans 12:1 NIV
- And in the book of Acts, we see the early Christians giving away everything: "All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had" –Acts 4:32 NIV

The New Testament standard is not 10%. The New Testament standard is *everything*.

But now let me ask you this: If Jesus is my master, and everything I have belongs to him, how do I demonstrate that? How do I make that a tangible reality?

Many times I've knelt at the altar and said something like, "Jesus, I'm all yours. Everything I have is yours." But I've yet to have an experience where Jesus calls me up and says, "Hey, Claude, you know how you said everything you have is mine? Well, I need the car. Leave the key in it and I'll pick it up tonight!"

If all I have belongs to God, how do I demonstrate that? For me, that's where tithing comes in. When I give God the first tenth, it's my way of saying, "God, everything I have is yours." It's not that I give God 10% and then the other 90% is mine to do with as I please. No, it all belongs to God—and tithing is the sign.

Go all the way back to the beginning of Scripture, to the book of Genesis. This is before the law. Before the Ten Commandments. Before Moses and the Exodus.

You have Abraham, the father of God's people. He got involved in a battle and he won. And in those days, you win a battle, you get all the other person's stuff. But Abraham doesn't just take all the stuff and go home. Instead, he goes to a priest of God named Melchizedek. And Genesis 14:20 says, *"Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything."*

Then later Abraham's grandson Jacob had a powerful experience of the presence of God, and God promised to bless him and to make him a blessing, and Jacob says, *"...of all that you give me, I will give you a tenth"* (Genesis 28:22).

Notice that in both of these stories the tithe is a response to what God has already done. Abraham and Jacob were not trying to earn God's approval. They were just trying to say, "Thank you."

So based on their example, and the examples of millions of Christians that have gone before me, I recommend the practice of tithing as an act of worship that says, "God, everything I have belongs to you."

Tithing is one way to make sure that money does not become my master. Now, it's not the only way.

- Another way is to live by a budget – because if I know where my money's going, then I've mastered it instead of it mastering me.
- Another way is to get out of debt – because the Bible says, "The borrower is slave to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7).
- Another way is to strengthen my relationship with God through Bible study, prayer, and worship – so that more and more I'm learning how to listen to God and resist the pull of money.

But tithing is a very tangible, very practical way to say, "Jesus is my master and money is not."

Now what if you absolutely cannot afford to tithe? Here's what I recommend:

- Start with a percentage that you *can* give.
- Commit to give that **FIRST** – that's what makes it a faith gift.
- Then, as God blesses that, go up one percent each year until you work your way up to tithing.

To me, Biblical Giving has three aspects. This is what makes it an act of worship:

Biblical Giving is...

1- Planned.

“On every Lord's Day, each of you should put aside some amount of money in relation to what you have earned and save it for this offering.”

1 Corinthians 16:2

2- Proportional.

“Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.”

--Deuteronomy 16:17

3- Priority

“Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops.”

--Proverbs 3:9

AND WHY DO WE DO THIS? This is very important. Please listen. Why do we give? Because the church needs the money? NO. *We do it because you and I need to give.*

Listen: If I was to stand here right now and say, “The church is going bankrupt – if we don’t get \$10,000 by tomorrow we’re going to have to close the church!” that would not be a reason for you to start giving.

And if I was to say, “A rich millionaire just died and left the church \$10 million and now we can run the church off the interest,” that would not be a reason for you to STOP giving.

We give as an act of worship.

We give as an act of gratitude.

We give as a way to grow spiritually.

We give because we want to be like Jesus.

We give because Jesus said, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also,” and we want our hearts to be in the right place.

We give because *Jesus is our master*. And we don’t want to be like that sailor going back and forth: “Polish the porthole ... swab the deck ... polish the porthole ... swab the deck...” We don’t want to have hearts that are divided. We want to have one heart devoted to one master.

And that’s why we give.