Either God will be our Master, or Wealth. Either we will use our money to build up our own little kingdom, or we will use our money in building up God’s Kingdom.

Two Masters? Choose One.

Vienna Presbyterian Church
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Mullholland prayer steadily for some time now. “Help me to have You, Jesus, as the sole content of my life today.” I pray that this prayer will stick with you this morning.

In Luke’s Gospel this morning, we will see something all too familiar and true. We will see a man whose life is divided, scattered, torn between two masters. Familiar? You and I are tossed and torn by the juggling and struggling of life’s responsibilities and circumstances. We are divided, scattered, torn in the battle of serving two masters. We struggle to make Jesus the sole content of our daily lives. It happens with work, marriage, family, and it happens in our relationship with God. We are divided in knowing who or what to give time, effort and allegiance to. We are divided in knowing who or what to serve.

Today’s sermon is about money. Can you believe it? It’s not even a Pledge Sunday or Capital Campaign Drive (but don’t forget about your IGNITE pledges). I don’t have an agenda, a pitch, an ask of you today. I just have one of Jesus’ parables, about money. There are more than 2,000 Bible verses about money. Jesus Himself spends a considerable amount of time talking about money. He talks more about money than about prayer!

Today’s Jesus-parable has been called the Story of the Dishonest Manager, or the Unjust Steward, or the Shrewd Accountant. In this parable, Jesus calls us to be responsible and generous with the resources God has given us. Jesus gives his
disciples a choice, really: “Either God will be your Master, or wealth will be your master. Either you will use your money to build up your own little kingdom, or you will use your money in building up God’s Kingdom.” Which kingdom will you choose? Which master will you serve? Help me to have You, Jesus, as the sole content of my life today.

Here’s the parable: like in chapter 15, Jesus is with His disciples, supping with sinners and tax collectors, while those “grumbling” Pharisees are listening in. Luke 16:1-13: Jesus told this story to his disciples: ‘There was a certain rich man who had a manager handling his affairs. One day a report came that the manager was wasting his employer’s money.’

The Greek word here for “wasting” also means “squandering.” In chapter 16, this shrewd manager does what the Prodigal Son does in chapter 15 – Pete’s sermon last Sunday. It’s the same Greek word—in a far-off country, the Prodigal Son squandered, wasted his Father’s inheritance (15:13). Here, the “prodigal” steward has wasted, squandered his Master’s money.

Verse 2: So the employer called him in and said, ‘What’s this I hear about you? Get your report in order, because you are going to be fired.’

What gets this manager fired is his outright dishonesty. He’s been lying about “over-charging” his bosses’ debtors and “siphoning off funds” for his own profit (Craig Keener, IVP Bible Background Commentary, 2014). He’s engaged in some wicked “price-fixing” of wheat and oil.

Verses 3 to 7: The manager thought to himself, ‘Now what? My boss has fired me. I don’t have the strength to dig ditches, and I’m too proud to beg. 4 Ah, I know how to ensure that I’ll have plenty of friends who will give me a home when I am fired.’ 5 So he invited each person who owed money to his employer to come and discuss the situation. He asked the first one, ‘How much do you owe him?’ 6 The man replied, ‘I owe
him 800 gallons of olive oil.' So the manager told him, ‘Take the bill and quickly change it to 400 gallons.' 7 ‘And how much do you owe my employer?’ he asked the next man. ‘I owe him 1,000 bushels of wheat,’ was the reply. ‘Here,’ the manager said, ‘take the bill and change it to 800 bushels.’

Attempting to save his job and his reputation, the manager now deploys two strategies. First, he goes to his bosses’ clients and offers to remove the interest charge (the “over charge”) from their debts. The steward chooses to follow Torah law (Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:35-37); he chooses to treat the debtors as if they’re intimate family; he’s no longer going to impose any interest on their debt (reducing what they truly owe = less wheat, less olive oil). It appears the manager has a change of heart; he’s going to swallow all the interest himself.

Second, the shrewd steward gives up all the commission he stands to make off their indebtedness. He’s giving up his own projected profits; he’s now going to strictly focus on his master’s profits, securing only what is purely owed his master. The steward is no longer going to profit from the inflated pricing he engaged in (Craig Keener).

Verse 8: The rich man had to admire the dishonest rascal for being so shrewd. And it is true that the children of this world are more shrewd in dealing with the world around them than are the children of the light.

Like the Prodigal Son last week, this dishonest steward has had a “coming to his senses.” He’s learning something as he’s examining his
own failures. By the world’s standards, Jesus is saying, people use their resources to *Get*, *Gain* and *Grab*. Instead, the manager seemingly sees the better way—to *Give*, to *Share*, to *Serve* his Master by directing his own resources now for the good of others. In Jesus’ strange economy, God even uses “sinners” (this shrewd dishonest manager) to advance His Kingdom, for the well-being of others!

In verse 9, Jesus says, *Here’s the lesson: Use your worldly resources to benefit others and make friends. Then, when your possessions are gone, they will welcome you to an eternal home.*

We are to use our money for that which is eternal. And what in our lives is eternal? People! In his book, *The Blessed Life*, Robert Morris says, “The only lasting things you will encounter today are people – our friends, our family, the lost, the lowly.” Morris writes, “We are to use our money to bring people to Christ and to show people the mercy of Christ – these people, that you’re generous towards, they will form your welcoming committee when you get to heaven!”

You saw this on the screens two Sundays ago. Three weeks ago, seven of us from VPC landed in Bulgaria for the purpose of supporting local pastors in spreading and sharing the gospel for Jesus Christ. We spent our time and our energy; we spent our money to be on-the-ground in Bulgaria. For example, for two days we worked at a Refugee Camp on the Turkey/Bulgaria border, distributing much-needed food bundles
and sharing Christ’s love through our translators (Kurds, Iraqis, Syrians).

While we were there, we got to celebrate with Ali, a young Syrian man living in the camp. At that Wednesday night worship service, there Ali promised his life to Jesus. We’ve been texting ever since. Here’s a text from Ali a couple weeks ago: “Lisa [ministry staff at the camp] teach me now the Bible, and I’m so happy for that. And I think I am in light by a super power – I don’t know what is happening to me, but I think it’s supernatural. It’s good thing. I am thankful; my heart is full in love and trust. God be with you, Father David.”

Robert Morris again writes: “The Devil knows that God can take earthly money and turn it into eternal fruit. God knows that the more money we give to the church (mission trips, ministry initiatives), the more souls are going to be rescued and saved. God knows that the more generous we are, the more the Kingdom of God is going to advance, and the more the kingdom of darkness is going to fail.”

Finally, verses 12-13: And if you are not faithful with other people’s things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?...

“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.”

You cannot serve God and mammon. Mammon means being “enslaved to money,” or “worldly or dishonest wealth” as some
other translations go. Jesus mentions “mammon” just once in two places—the same story is in Matthew 6 as it is here in Luke 16. Jesus is clearly suggesting that there is no middle-ground. It is possible to serve Mammon instead of serving God. But Jesus states that it is impossible to serve both at the same time. Mammon says TAKE; God says GIVE. Mammon says ACCUMULATE; God says SHARE. Mammon is SELFISH; God is GENEROUS. You will love and be loyal to one; you will hate and despise the other. There is no half-and-half here. “Mammon,” Morris writes, “is apparently a jealous god.”

Help me to have You, Jesus, as the sole content of my life today.

Mammon promises us a lot of things that only God can truly provide—lasting security, true belonging, lasting significance, real power, true freedom. Jesus is not telling us to hate money. Jesus is saying that if we love God, we will hate the greedy, deceiving spirit that comes from worshipping money. Jesus understands the struggle within us. Jesus knows that both mammon and God are always talking to us. Every time we’re praying about giving sacrificially to our local church or missions or benevolence ministries, mammon is there whispering (or occasionally shouting) in our ears, trying to distract us or change our mind!

As Paul explains to his spiritual son Timothy, it’s the “love of money” that is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). When money makes people selfish, when money leads people to take advantage of others, then money is ugly and unholy. When money produces addictions (gambling, gaming, excessive food
and drink, buying porn) in people and when money is used to use and abuse people, then money is not of God, it’s evil.

So you and I can choose between two masters; you and I must choose. Which kingdom will you choose to advance – yours or God’s? Which master will you serve – mammon or God? In His parable, Jesus shows us that there is no middle ground. There is no half-and-half. It is possible to serve mammon instead of serving God. But Jesus states that it is impossible to serve both at the same time. We must choose.

How familiar it is that we so often find ourselves trying to do and be too much at one time. We are divided, scattered, and we find ourselves squandering our lives. Whether it is work, or parenting, or school, or activities, we get ourselves spread too thin; we find ourselves becoming thread-bare. As Pete shared with us last week, it’s not so much that the son is a terrible prodigal; or this week, that this shrewd manager is a horrible squanderer. He is. They are both prodigals and squanderers. We are, too—prodigals and squanderers!

Instead, the focus for what we will choose, God or mammon, is to be on the God who is Himself a prodigal, a squanderer! God Himself is “wastefully extravagant” in His love for the two brothers; God Himself is wastefully extravagant in His love for the master and his manager. Best of all, God is “wastefully extravagant” in His love for us!

There is a song by Cory Asbury called “Reckless Love.” It’s about the extravagantly-wasteful, over-the-top love God has for us. It’s about the reckless, all-out love Jesus goes to to get to us. The Refrain goes: “There’s no shadow He won’t light up for us, there’s no mountain Jesus won’t climb up to get to us. There’s no wall He won’t kick down, there’s no lie in us that Jesus won’t tear down to get to us, to show His love for us.”

Mammon or God? Choose the Master Jesus. Help me to have You, Jesus, as the sole content – all my thoughts, actions, my words – as the sole content of my life TODAY. AMEN.

Help me to have You, Jesus, as the sole content of my life today