

Matthew 6:19-24 (NIV)
 “If You Can’t Serve Two”

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy,^[a] your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are unhealthy,^[b] your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

²⁴ “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.

Footnotes:

- a. [Matthew 6:22](#) The Greek for *healthy* here implies *generous*.
- b. [Matthew 6:23](#) The Greek for *unhealthy* here implies *stingy*.

People look forward to many different things. We look forward to a birthday, time with family, our favorite entertainment, our favorite dessert. There are very few Christians who look forward to stewardship season. Here, it happens in the fall, and it concludes with Consecration Sunday, November 2nd. There are Christians, and perhaps even fellow members, who find this topic so unsettling, that their memories trick them into believing that money is “all the church ever talks about.” It could be that their ears continue to ring for a long time when they hear what God expects of his human managers – when we hear what God expects of us.

People who think we talk far too much about money need to be careful in their generalizations, because Jesus spoke about it over and over.

- Jesus talked about money more than He did about Heaven and Hell put together.

- In fact, Jesus talked about money and wealth more than anything else, except the Kingdom of God (what it means to be follower of Jesus).
- 11 of the 39 parables recorded in the Gospel talk about money or treasure.
- 1 of every 7 verses in the Gospel of Luke talk about money.

So, people who have a blanket problem with principles of stewardship and the management of God’s gifts need to have a “come to Jesus” meeting with the Lord himself. Let me know how that turns out. ☺ Let me know if you hear something different from him personally from what you hear God communicate in the Bible.

Why does the Holy Spirit cause so many of these steward and manager words to be recorded in the Books of the Bible? Because being managers of the gifts God gives us is an issue we deal with day after day after day. Because we use money day after day after day.

Money has only been an issue after money came into use. If you lived in a culture where you bartered your ability to make shoes with your neighbor’s ability to raise wheat, you didn’t need money, or at least not much of it. But when we started converting all of our effort and all of our inheritance into money, it has become the most consuming issue among most members of the human race. We’ve pretty much put all of our value eggs in the money basket, and when we talk about our values and our priorities, we usually follow the money. Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:21: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* The reason we’re talking about it here and now is that it’s a topic that is not only important to us. We need to talk about it because it’s important to God. It is a powerful indicator of where he stands in our priorities.

Some people argue that they don’t have an obsession with money, and they have no struggle with God regarding money.

But if you talk with these people honestly, we might find that they have an extraordinary stamp collection, or a garage full of sports equipment, or a history of expensive vacations, or who knows what

– things that represent tens of thousands of dollars and even more. It's not money, right? It's just that we have converted our time and our money into something that represents a significant investment.

All of this concern on the part of Jesus regarding money is a clear indication that he loves us and is concerned about us. He has redeemed us, not with gold or silver, but with his holy precious blood, and with his innocent suffering and death. He could not have paid more. He paid the ultimate price to redeem us from sin, death, and the devil. He wants to support us in every struggle we experience, and if we are normal, we will continue to struggle as managers, as stewards of the things God gives us.

UCLA professor Jared Diamond wrote a book, which later was turned into a miniseries by National Geographic. His book is called *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. In the process of his research and his travels in the South Pacific, he became good friends with indigenous people in New Guinea. One of the questions asked by one of his close friends there was:

“Why you white man have so much cargo and we New Guineans have so little?” “Cargo” was the native's term for STUFF. When Jared Diamond landed in the remote village, he brought with him all kinds of personal and professional STUFF. His new friends were puzzled as to why any single person would have so much cargo – so much STUFF. If only they knew how much more Dr. Diamond had back home – probably not much more nor much less than any of us have. The citizens of New Guinea couldn't figure out what it was all for.

In 1997, Ruth and I spent six months in Riga Latvia, where I taught at the Lutheran Seminary there. The Christians in Latvia told us many times, that they would pray for us, and for all American Christians, because of the strong temptation that must come with our wealth, with our stuff.

Both of these observations, coming from opposite sides of the globe, are right on. We struggle with some of our blessings, but as always, the Lord does not leave us on our own to muddle through it. He is ready to provide increased faith and increased love and increased trust so that we can prevail with this struggle against mammon, against money, against stuff.

The words of Jesus cannot be more clear. “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.” This is not a suggestion, or a hint. It is a command. . “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth.”

Why not store them on earth? Because we won't be here very long. Because the earth will not be here very long. The old world is going to pass away, with all our stuff! We can't take it with us. We can't send our earthly treasure on ahead! But Jesus says we can store up treasures in heaven:

“But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.” We have only a few Biblical glimpses of what heaven will be like, but this we know for certain: there will be people in heaven, people whose resurrected bodies will be reunited with their souls, and all who are wearing the white robes of the righteousness of Jesus Christ will live forever!

How did they get there? They died in faith. They died trusting in God for their salvation. They were given the gift of eternal life because the Good News about Jesus Christ was shared with them by someone – someone who was storing up treasure in Heaven. That someone can easily be you. You should look forward to seeing people you've never met, who will say to you, “I'm in heaven today by the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and I would never have found out about it if you, my friend, had failed to resist storing up treasures on earth. You used what God gave you to store up treasure in Heaven. Part of that treasure is me!”

The words of Jesus conclude this text, and they are both striking and powerful: “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.”

So we can't have two masters. God or money? Which master do you want? After you have decided, how can you tell how you're doing in the struggle? I expect that after just a couple of weeks, you will come to understand very clearly the high expectations God has of his managers, of his stewards, of his people. I expect that most of you will prayerfully make a commitment, and even put it into writing and seal it in an envelope. But the struggle will not end on November 2. Satan is not

going to take a year off, and let you celebrate your rededication without interference. The world is not going to stop trying to induce you and persuade you to believe that you need to put yourself first. Your own sinful flesh will nag you and irritate you, urging you to get real and look out for #1, meaning me, myself, and I.

Jesus invites you to be devoted to him as master. He also wants you to despise the other potential master – money, mammon, stuff! Not because he needs the money, but because he wants you to be confident and strong in the struggle.

If you can't serve two – masters, that is – then let the Lord who gives you life be the master of your life. Let it be Jesus to whom you are devoted. And at the same time, let's put money and mammon and stuff in its place. Let them be tools to be used to store up treasure in heaven. May God bless you in your ongoing struggle as stewards and managers of God's generous gifts.

Amen?

Philip C. Tesch
Fredericksburg, VA
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