

“TREASURE (#2): THE PROBLEM WITH TWO MASTERS”

(Matthew 6:24)

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--I--

1. Read CEB Text: Matthew 6:24 and Pray.
2. Perhaps you've seen the license plates that show the phrase "A House Divided" accompanied by the logos of two rival college football teams: Georgia and Auburn; or Auburn and Alabama; or Georgia and Florida.

A--Now, the phrase itself often reminds people of Abraham Lincoln's famous "house divided" speech that he made in 1858, where he was talking about the American nation being divided over the issue of slavery.

B--What many people don't realize, though, is that Lincoln *did NOT* author that phrase.

1--Instead, it was originally spoken by Jesus in Mark 3:24-25, where he said, "*If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.*"

2--And in those verses, he's explaining how competing allegiances in a kingdom, a house, or even a heart will lead to destruction -- that division will always lead to war in which there is either constant strife, or where one side eventually wins.

3. Well, last week we began a new sermon series called "**Treasure**" <sup>1</sup> in which we're exploring how to make God and His ways the "treasure" of our lives.

A--I challenged us to consider *where* we were investing our hearts by looking at where we spend our time, money, and energy. <sup>2</sup>

B--And in doing so, many of us may discover that our hearts -- just like some of our football allegiances -- are *divided*, as well, giving multiple allegiances to multiple masters.

--II--

4. In today's single verse (Vs.24) from Matthew 6, Jesus says that "*no one can serve two masters,*" and that any of us trying to do so will inevitably "*love the one and hate the other,*" or "*be devoted to one and despise the other.*"

A--You see, every "yes" that I give obligates me to another commitment, and the result over time is a heart that's stretched thinner and thinner, is more and more divided, and has less and less time for what I truly *want* to invest my life and resources in.

1--In other words, multiple "yes-es" lead to multiple masters. <sup>3</sup>

2--And so, Jesus ends this verse on a note of realism by pointing out that we "*cannot serve both God and money!*"

B--That's why throughout the Bible, people of faith are called to have a single-minded devotion to *GOD*, and God *alone!* <sup>4</sup>

1--God doesn't *want* shared allegiance with money, or anything else. He doesn't want just a *piece* (or the left-overs) of your life or mine.

2--No. He wants to be our *everything* -- to be the singular object of our devotion.

5. Of course, the reality for most of us is that too often we DO have divided loyalties and divided hearts.

A--For example, too many of us have said "yes" to too many commitments, signed too many contracts, and swiped too many credit cards.

1--And now, we have no choice but to work to pay off these things which -- in the end -- *don't* make us *happy*, but *do* cause us *stress*.

2--This explains why we tend to resent things that pull us away from what we *want* to be our treasure.

3--Some people, for instance, hate or resent their job, their boss, their monthly mortgage payment, or their busy daily schedule because these things keep us from spending enough time with our family, friends, church, etc.

B--No wonder, then, that Jesus warns in today's verse that when we're serving two, three, or ten masters, our hearts can't help but be divided between them, and we're therefore *not* going to be able to live either as we *want*, or as God *intends*.

1--Looking back at the Old Testament and noting Israel's constant, flirtatious association with idols, author Jacob Armstrong observes that "*A relationship with gods [little "g"] leads to anger and fear, but a relationship with God [big "G"] leads to peace and calm.*" <sup>5</sup>

2--I don't know about you, but there've times in my life when I was stressed and on-edge, and looking back I realize it was because in those times I was giving excessive attention and concern to things which were *not* (and did not *serve*) Almighty God -- *money and possessions* being foremost among them! <sup>6</sup>

6. Now, does all of this mean we can't enjoy possessions or shouldn't work hard to make a living? No, not at all! Nor does it mean we can't have a healthy *relationship* with them. <sup>7</sup>

A--But it *does* mean that we can't *SERVE* God and these things. They can't *both* be our master -- we can't live under the lordship of *God* AND the lordship of *money, wealth, or possessions*. Instead, we have to *choose*.

B--And when we choose God, we find that all our *other* allegiances (including to money and possessions) find their proper place.

C--And instead of a heart, or house, or life that's divided and stressed, our hearts find peace and calm because those other things have been brought into alignment *beneath* our one Lord and Master (God).

--III--

7. So, how do we do it? If we're not already, how do we choose to make God and His ways the true treasure & sole Master of our lives? As we wrap up, let me offer two suggestions:

A--First, I think we simply need to ***slow down long enough to see and recognize all the directions our life is headed.***

1--For example... Take a stroll along West Point Lake;... Roll on the floor with your children or grandchildren, or take them to play Granger park,...

2--Pick up and play that dusty guitar that you've been too busy to enjoy;... Take a bike ride on the bike paths at Callaway Gardens,...

3--Make time for that daily Bible reading and devotional that you've been promising God you'd do;... Sit with someone *different* at Wednesday Night Supper and get to know them; and so on.

4--When we do things like these, we may just discover "heavenly treasure" that's been around us all the time, but that we've missed because we've been too busy and distracted giving attention to worldly "gods" that call out to us!

B--A second step is to **learn the value of "NO."**<sup>8</sup>

1--You know, we all have a *finite* amount of time, energy and money to go around.

2--And when we use these in service to two, six, or eight masters -- each of which require *everything* from us -- then our *real* treasures (the ones we *want* to focus on) tend to just sit on a shelf collecting dust because we don't have the resources left to reach them.

3--So, if we want to be able to say "YES" to more things that are true *treasures* in life, then we have to learn (and remember) that every "NO" to *one* thing is (in fact) a "YES" to something else.

4--Put the other way around,... if we want to give more "YES-es" to *God*, to our *church*, and to our *family*, then it'll require us saying more "NO-s" to other "good" things (like our civic clubs, sports events, and our tech gadgets).

5--This will take great courage, and it'll feel uncomfortable at first. But the more we learn to say "NO" to multiple *earthly* masters, the more *freedom* we'll find to say "YES" to what our one true *heavenly* Master is calling us to. <sup>9</sup>

--IV--

8. You see, the bottom line is that God doesn't want us to journey through life giving ourselves to every (little "g") god that beckons or calls to us -- if we do, we have a "***Problem with Two Masters.***"

A--Instead, God created and designed us for Himself *alone*.

B--WE are *His* treasure, and He invites us to find *our* treasure *singly and solely* in HIM!

C--So today, who (or what) is YOUR Master?

9. [PRAYER]

#### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> This series is based on the "**Treasure**" stewardship program by Jacob Armstrong (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), and many (if not most) of the concepts and ideas in my series of sermons come from the books and other resources in and of this program.

<sup>2</sup> And I mentioned that one way to discover this is by examining our checkbook expenditures or our calendars -- where we spend our money and our time reveals what's important to us (our "treasure").

<sup>3</sup> It's hard, after all, to say "no" to things. We don't like to let people down, so we don't do it. Instead, when something is requested of us, our first inclination is to say "yes." We like the initial feeling of elation that comes with it, and like the feeling that people need us and are grateful for us. It feels good to say "yes," and uncomfortable to say "no". So we don't say "no."

<sup>4</sup> For instance, in the Old Testament, many of the prophets called the people of Israel to forsake their pagan gods and Baals so that they could follow the God of Abraham and Isaac (For example, read Joshua 24:15, 1 Kings 18:21, and Daniel 3:13-18). In the gospels, when Jesus casts out a demons and unclean spirits, it's because he knows that those things can't dwell in a person if God dwells there -- there's not room for both masters (For example, read Matthew 12:43-35). And in the early church, the earliest Christian creed ("Jesus is Lord", Romans 10:9) was a direct assault on the deity and lordship of the Roman emperor -- an assertion that Jesus (not the emperor) was the only true "Lord" and Master of a follower of Christ.

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Armstrong, Treasure: A Four Week Study on Faith and Money (Daily Readings) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014), p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> If we find ourselves preoccupied with or experiencing anger or fear over something that we own (a car, a house, a piece of technology), we may want to ask ourselves "*What am I giving excessive attention to?*" For example, I'm not someone who tends to get angry very easily with *people*. But my wife will confirm that when it comes to technology (like my computer or smart phone), I can get worked up *really fast!* And every time I do, I have to ask myself: "*Why did I do that? What is so important about that thing that I have to get worked up over it like that? Have I allowed that THING to become an idol or a god?*"

<sup>7</sup> In fact, according to the founder of Methodist Christianity John Wesley, the first "rule" in the use of money is "*Earn all you can*" (From Wesley's sermon The Use of Money -- for comparison, the other two are "*Save all you can*" and the "*Give all you can*").

<sup>8</sup> We've all heard it before, but many of us need to learn that "*No*" is a complete sentence!

<sup>9</sup> In other words, every "NO" to an *earthly* commitment can be a "YES" to *God*.