



Matthew 6:24

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.”

Reflection

Today for the third day in a row Jesus is speaking to us about money. He's turned

from the religious hypocrisy of the Jewish leadership to the materialism of the Gentiles. Materialism made the Gentiles' world go around and nothing has changed 2000 years later. Materialism makes our world go around too.

Jesus started by commanding us not to store up treasures on earth, but rather to store up treasure in heaven. He left us with the warning that where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. Then yesterday Jesus told us to fix our eyes on eternal things, not on things of this world, so that we might live meaningful lives, and not left out in the darkness. And finally today, just in case we have missed the stark nature of what Jesus has been teaching us, Jesus spells it out as clearly as he possible can for us,

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.”

He couldn't be more blunt could he? No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money.

And we might agree in principle, but in practice, many of us, even most of us give it a go. Western Christians particularly are tempted to strive after the so-called best of both worlds. Material prosperity, comfort and luxury; and being an active member of the local church and raising your children in the faith. In the week we work hard in our careers – even excel at them –

we chase financial goals, we make grand plans for our retirement and enjoy holidays whenever we can afford the time. In between these pursuits we do our best to attend church on Sundays, a group mid-week, and we volunteer when we can in other ways at church. What I've just described is the busy pattern of life that is most common amongst our churches. The modern Christian tries to have it both ways – we try and excel in material prosperity, as well as in our Christian lives.

So how do we then apply the real life experience of most Christians to this polarising statement by Jesus? He says, it's God or money, there's no middle-ground; and yet real life in the modern world seems to almost exclusively inhabit this middle-ground.

Perhaps the place to start is with Jesus' first sentence where he says 'No one can serve two masters.' If we are speaking literally, well yes you can, it is possible to have two masters and to serve one of them some of the time and another for the rest of the time. It's possible. And Jesus' next sentence goes on to discuss in actual fact what happens when you do serve two masters. So we're best to understand Jesus' first sentence as this:

No one can serve two masters for long – it doesn't end well. That's the point he's making. You see, Jesus then goes on to show that divided loyalties don't serve you or either master well. When you're working for the one, you're letting down the other. And when you're working for the other,

you're letting the first one down. Not only will they feel unhappy with the arrangement but so will you. You'll always be conflicted, I'm doing this now, but shouldn't I be doing that? I can only do this just so far, so that I'll still have enough time to do that. And so there's this perpetual tug-of-war between your divided loyalties. Perhaps you can keep it up for a while, perhaps you can keep all the balls in the air for a while – but in the end, you're going to end up hating the first one, and loving the second or being devoted to the first one and despising the second.

It doesn't take much to bring Jesus illustration into our daily life does it? Already so many of us are so busy pursuing our careers and striving for our financial goals – the new car, getting into the property

market or buying that investment property, putting our children through private schools, having enough money in our retirement accounts so that we can really enjoy our retirement. Modern life is really busy. So then when we try and be the Christian that Jesus would have us be – well there's a whole new layer of demands. Church every Sunday, meetings in the week, reading our bibles and praying each day, thoughtful living in terms of ethics and social justice, praying and teaching our children from the bible each night before bed. We can pull it off for a while, we can serve two masters for a while, but then all of a sudden, one day we wake up exhausted. We start saying to ourselves, 'I've got to cut back.' But we can't always do that straight away. So we find ourselves beginning to begrudge certain activities

– yet we soldier on stoically. We keep trying to do everything, but we begin to hate some of the things we're doing, because they're stealing time from some of the other things we love. Until one day we throw our hands up in the air and say, 'I just can't do it anymore.' Church is taking up too much of my time. I've got to cut back. **God**, you're taking up too much of *my* time.

Jesus would save us all this time and heartache by simply saying: 'Look guys, in the end: you cannot serve two masters. You can try, but it won't end well. In the end you'll end up hating one and loving the other, or you'll end up being devoted to one and despising the other. You cannot serve both God and money.'

Here's the thing. We've just learnt in the Lord's Prayer to pray 'Give us today our daily bread' – precious Father, provide for our needs. And over the next few days Jesus is going to tell us we've got nothing to worry about, our precious Father will provide for all our needs. But our wants ... well that's another matter. God wants us to want him, not to want 'stuff.' He wants us to pursue him, not to pursue material things. And Jesus is saying to us look, no matter what you think you can do, you might think you can pull it off, and pursue material things and God, but in the end, it's one or the other. So I'm going to save you time, make your choice. You cannot serve both God and money. So love the lord your God with all your heart, and with all your mind, and with all your soul, and will all your strength. Seek first his king-

dom and his righteousness, and all these other trifling things that you're concerned with, chances are that many of them will be added to you as well, but you'll barely notice them for how incredible it will feel to love God like this.

Think

Please stop now and meditate on this verse. Could there be a verse more applicable to modern life? Wrestle with, try and deny, try and reason your way around it and then I pray by the power of the Holy Spirit that you would embrace its truth, and pray for me too.

Pray

Then spend some time praying that you

and I would love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and serve him only, until the end of our days.