

Which Master Will You Serve?

by

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“No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things, and they ridiculed him. Luke 16:13-14 (ESV)

Can't you just see with a little imagination, what happened in this scene? Jesus is speaking to the people around Him, but His message offended the Pharisees the most. Why is this? It was because Jesus challenged an idol in their life ... their love for money. What did they do with Jesus' rebuke? They did like many of us would do when confronted with a truth that requires us to give up something we cherish. They discredited the messenger by ridiculing Him. Keep using your imagination with the scene by seeing yourself as an observer in the crowd who just gets by daily with what you can earn, or one of those Pharisees who had great wealth, or some point in between. You choose your point of view based on your circumstance of life right now, for the message is the same with each individual, and it is timeless for you and me now. What would you do then and now? If you put your hope in money, you would look at the man standing before you giving this advice and observe that He is opposite of any successful person you would know. I mean look at Him? His only possession was the garments He wore. Jesus' garments that He wore represented the sum of His material wealth, and if someone wanted to discredit His message they would look at Him like the Pharisees did with contempt and say, *“Easy for you to say about our view of money, for you have nothing!”* Then to reinforce their disdain, they would think there was a hidden agenda with the man that would include an outstretched hand wanting some of their money, for after all Jesus looked the part of a homeless man. Can't you just see this happening in your mind's eyes, and see how the truth Jesus presented about right living before God was missed because they feared losing the money that they loved and pursued?

Speaking of outside appearances, I've seen several movies depicting Jesus, and I generally observe the garment they have on the character representing Him. The best representation and the one that affects me the most is when the character is wearing a tough, tattered robe. In my mind's eye, I see a robe that is a garment to be worn for traveling. I see it as a garment that was not delicate, as a “gentleman of the day” would wear, for it had been with Him through many miles of walking and sleeping outside by a roadside, or by the sea. It kept Him warm on cold nights and protected Him from all kinds of weather. It likely had some stains on it. It might even have a little smell to it, for the country was rugged that Jesus passed through, and the sweat of Jesus would have created an aroma on the robe that hung on His strong back, for after all Jesus was a man who sweated. I'm sure Jesus would have been seen a little like some of the homeless men walking through cities and roadsides back then, and even today. Got the picture? If you want to discredit a message that is getting too close for comfort, it would have been easy to do so with Jesus, by basing it on outside appearances. He had no material wealth to jealously guard, nor did He put any hope in money getting Him out of His poverty. In other words, what Jesus represented was the opposite of worldly ambition and material gain, and we observe a moral authority such as this in a person, it shakes the conscience of a materialistic person. We can't handle the message, so we discredit the messenger and that is what happened.

Why does the look of a garment worn by a character in a movie representing Jesus affect me? It is because in seeing the tattered robe, I am then reminded that my King left His royal throne in Heaven and all the unfathomable wealth of the universe that He had at His disposal, to come and show me how to live. I am reminded that He took on the form of a bond servant and loved me, and served me, and blessed me, and washed my feet. This puts me back into a right perspective about the material wealth I have been given and how I must use it. Like the tough, tattered robe Jesus wore that simply serviced His needs but did not define Him, whatever my material circumstances are should serve my needs and God's cause, but not define me. My material circumstances are a blessing from God to be used to honor Him, and by doing so, I abandon any idol of misunderstanding about money that may be attached to it.

Some of you may be saying or thinking, “*Easy for you to say. You're in full-time ministry, and you live a different life. And, by the way, are you trying to raise support for your ministry?*” So, I ask you to not discredit me by thinking I have an outstretched hand to you. Let me remind you that I was a successful businessman for over thirty-five years before God called me to a vocational ministry to make disciples. During that time, I had to work through the tough challenges of Jesus' words, and learn to abandon ownership of myself and my resources to my King's purposes. It didn't come easy, for rarely is a sacrifice easy. It required a little true faith on my part, to see God's great faithfulness on His part. It was a battle to find freedom from the bondage I had for the love of material things that money bought me. It is the same now with trusting Him with this ministry's financial needs. Will we trust Him to provide for this ministry, or will fear of failure create an idol of self-sufficiency in our leaders and me? Do we think all we need are more donors and resources to do the ministry we are called to, or do we move out and do the ministry, and trust that God will provide what is needed through whatever sources He uses? God has shown us that He can be trusted, and it is always a test to trust Him like He requires. But, we will trust Him, and that is our plan to build a ministry to His glory. Though it seems like a frightening proposition at times, it is the smartest thing we will ever do, for God rewards aggressive trust in Him.

It was when I came to see that I never found true joy from the money I guarded or things I purchased, that I was able to see the truth that I had a false impression about what success is. When through my personal experiences with seeing the truth of God's word and promises being fulfilled about His provisions and blessings, I have been able to see God prosper me beyond anything I could have secured by my own efforts. God has blessed me far beyond what I could do for myself. After this breakthrough while being a Christian businessman, I knew God was leading me to share these truths in mentoring other businessmen, which eventually led me to totally dedicate my career and interest to making disciples for Christ. So please hear my message about the purpose of your wealth, and not discredit me by thinking I am fund-raising you to support this ministry. Instead let me focus on your life as His disciple, and help you find the *Treasure of the Universe*, for that is my message to you today, and something you desperately need.

Similar to what Jesus pointed out, I cannot help a man or woman become a true disciple of Christ without helping that person understand that his or her love of money and materialism will hinder their progress. These things must find a place under the Lordship of Jesus and be seen as a sacred responsibility to use for His glory. This is an essential aspect of discipleship. Now let me clear. I am not proposing that you give everything away and live as a pauper. Rather I am saying that we must use all we have to God's glory. We take what we need of the blessings God provides us, but in all things make sure we honor God with all of it. We embrace a perspective that our wealth is really God's, and we are stewards of it. By doing this the wealth

entrusted to us doesn't define us. We must understand that the wealth that we are stewards of and might think of as our own is really God's, and how we value it is critical. We either love money and jealously guard it, or we love God and generously invest His wealth in that which delights Him. It is pretty obvious what a true disciple of Christ does. He is about his or her King's business.

“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.” Proverbs 3: 9-10 (ESV)

Our King is the most generous Master we will ever serve. He has given promises to those of us who will be generous with the wealth that has been entrusted to our care. He tells us He will be extremely generous to us in return when we are generous with others. This is a promise from Him. Because we now start a new year, let us now resolve that this year we will serve the *Master of the Universe*, rather than the master of money. Let us give Him the opportunity to show us that His promises are true, for He is true, and we need to know this fact by our personal experience with Him. This year the idol of the love of money must be torn down in our lives. This year we will build an altar of worship, by reinvesting that which has been entrusted by God to us, into those things that honor Him. By honoring our King with the first of our produce, and all that we have, He will bless us beyond our current understanding. Do not cheat yourself from this blessing. Happy New Year. May our King shower you with His love and blessings and you see Him as He is.