

“Two Masters”
Reverend Bill Gause
Overbrook Presbyterian Church
4th Sunday of Lent
March 14, 2021

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:19-21, 24

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ... ²⁴“No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.



Sermon: “Two Masters”

Now, contrary to what you may have heard, money is not bad. People often quote the Bible as saying, “Money is the root of all evil,” but those people are wrong. What they are quoting, incorrectly, is 1st Timothy 6 which actually reads:

*“Those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. **For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.**”¹*

So, it’s not money, but *the love of money* that causes problems. Which is also what Jesus is getting at in this passage from the Sermon on the Mount we just read. Earning, saving and spending money are not bad things. I mean, we evolved long ago from an agrarian, craftsman society where we grew, made, and hunted everything we needed, into a society of workers who trade and earn and buy. So, our entire economy is based on people being able to get, keep, and spend money. There’s nothing inherently destructive about a system built on money. But when we make getting, keeping, and spending money a primary goal, and neglect to share it; when we strive for more and more even as others of God’s children can’t get money or keep it long enough to spend it on the things they need, like food, and medicine, and adequate shelter, well, I believe that is counter to God’s intention.

What is God’s intention for our money? I can’t speak with authority, but I can tell you what I believe, and that is that God does not want us living lavishly while others of God’s children struggle to survive.

There’s a restaurant in Amarillo Texas called the Big Texan Steak House. Their famous for their 72oz steak dinner. It comes with a shrimp cocktail, salad, baked potato, and bread for \$72.00. But if you can eat it all, by yourself, within one hour, it’s free. That’s enough food to easily feed a family, but individuals make the attempt every day. Well over 1,000 every year.² There’s even a live stream where you can watch people try.³ Mary and I were watching TV the other night, flipping channels and looking for something interesting when I came across a Travel Channel show called Man vs. Food. Here’s a guy who takes on challenges just like that one, for entertainment. And as I sat there on my couch watching this man try to consume, in this case 4 and a half pounds of breakfast food within 30 minutes at a Boston Pub, for the grand prize of a T-Shirt and his name on the wall, I found myself wondering, how many hungry people are there in the world that would benefit from that food, and here is a guy trying to choke it all down at once just to see if he can. He couldn’t, by the way. No t-shirt for him.

You see, money is not evil. But when we hoard it. When we waste it. When we use it for frivolous things while others of God’s children struggle just to have enough for the day, that’s evil. God has given us so much. It is God’s desire that we not just live, but that we have life and have it abundantly. But that is also God’s desire for all God’s children. Which means what God has given us is meant to be shared. So, while money is not - in itself - evil, ignoring God’s intention and storing up for ourselves while others starve, is.

There’s a great scene in an episode of the old television show MASH where the doctors desperately need a very specific piece of equipment. They go to the supply depot and find that the supply sergeant actually has three in his warehouse, just sitting there. But when they ask for one, he turns them down.

“But you’ve got three!” Protests one of the doctors.

“That’s right,” replies the sergeant. “And if I give one away, I’ll only have two. And two is not as good as three.”

“But you’re not even using them,” points out the other doctor.

To which the sergeant replies “That’s because If I use one of these and it breaks down, then I’ll only have two.”⁴

The supply sergeant's message is clear: My security in abundance is more important than your basic necessity. And how often do we see that in the world? The need to have not just enough, but extra, more than enough, a cushion, just in case. Having some is great. But if I give some away, then I won't have as much. And more, is better than less.

Our relationship with God and money ultimately comes down to trust. Do we trust God and trust in God's intention for the world? Or do we trust our money and our ability to earn and save it?

Now again, I don't think having money is evil. I don't think Jesus argues that. But what I do think he wants is for us to use the money with which God has blessed us, for the purposes to which God has called us. And while we probably can't do much alone, together, as the community of faith, we can do amazing things. If we will trust in God. If we will share what God has given us.

When I was kid growing up in Georgetown, South Carolina, I used to walk to and from school with my friends every day. Our route took us past Hardees and every now and then on our way home, we would stop in a buy a soft drink. We didn't have a lot of money because we were kids, so when I say we would buy a drink, I don't mean we *each* would buy a drink, I mean that we would pool our money and buy *A* drink. We would empty our pockets onto one of the tables in back, sort out the buttons and lint, and then scrape together whatever nickels and pennies and dimes we had that day, and one of our group who was selected for his character and honesty and trustworthiness with money, would go forward to the counter and order. Usually, it was Sprite and usually it was a small or medium... which were both tiny by today's standards of fast-food smalls and mediums. Then we set the cup on a table, and gathering around it, each of us would put in our straw and begin to drink. At the same time. Did I mention that there were five in our group? Yes, there was some straw pinching at times, and you would always run the risk of backwash in a situation like that, but together, we were able to have a treat, that none of us could have afforded alone.

If we can trust in God's provision and in God's Kingdom, if we can join together in sharing what God gives us, we can accomplish so much more than any of us could alone.

Because I can do a lot of things by myself, but I can't cook a meal large enough for all the families served by the YWCA Family Center Shelter. But together, we can. By myself, I can't build a home for a family who needs one, I can't provide medicines for people without insurance, I can't provide enough warm winter coats for all the children who can't afford them. But together, we can. By myself I can't nurture the children of this congregation and teach their Sunday School classes, lead their youth group, be their confirmation covenant partners, but together, we can. By myself I can't provide a church home in which to worship God and from which to share the good news of the Gospel with the world, but together we can. By myself, I can't love and serve all of God's people, but together, we can.

But before we can do any of that, we have to trust that it's really what God wants us to do. We have to be willing to follow God's lead and place more value on God's Kingdom than on our own financial well-being. Which is hard to do. I know it is. But then isn't that a part of what this season of Lent is supposed to be? Offering us a chance for self-reflection, to identify the places where we fall short, and to repent and recommit ourselves to God?

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to love and serve the giver of all good gifts, more than the gifts themselves. And we exhibit our trust in God, and acknowledge God as our master, when we commit those gifts God gives us to the work to which God calls us.

To God be all glory, honor, power, and dominion, in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.

End Notes

¹ 1st Timothy 6:9-10, NRSV

² Contributors to Wikimedia projects. "The Big Texan Steak Ranch." 5 Feb. 2021, en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Big_Texan_Steak_Ranch&oldid=1004937924.

³ "Live Stream - The Big Texan Steak Ranch." Big Texan Steak Ranch, 9 Mar. 2021, www.bigtexan.com/live-stream.

⁴ Gelbart, Larry, and Laurence Marks. "The Incubator." *M*A*S*H*, season 2, episode 12, CBS, 1 Dec. 1973.