

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Matthew 6:24-34

We cannot serve two masters. Knowing we are serving God in our callings, whatever they might be, however great or lowly they might seem, as employers, employees, teachers, students, single people, parents, Christians, grandparents, widows, or widowers, ought to be more valuable to us than any heap of money or earthly treasure. What we are doing for our Lord and for our neighbor ought to weigh much more heavily in the balance of our lives than what our paycheck says. Yes, we have to pay the bills, but we dare never bend the knee to them. Better to make a difference for God's kingdom and your neighbor's well-being than to make a different pay grade or another digit. More money will never make us more valuable to God, indeed nothing will, because He has already considered us worth His only-begotten Son's very own blood, shed on the cross to buy us, to redeem us, to make us His own.

When we commit ourselves to serving God, to seeking His kingdom and His righteousness above all and in all we do, the rest certainly falls into place. We in this way find contentment with what we have as God sees to it that we have what we need. If we recognize what He has given us in His Son, crucified for our sins and raised for our life, if we realize that He has given us the greatest thing, how can we not then also trust Him for lesser things? On the contrary, if we do not truly take to heart this greatest gift of God, the gift of forgiveness and new life in Christ, we will certainly agonize over the lesser things, doubt God's provision and goodness, and worry and desperately scrape for more and more.

When I was working on this sermon, I thought for a moment about eating a dollar to make a point. But then I thought, "Who knows where that dollar has been? That could be sorta gross." But my point would have been well made. So sorry, I'm not going to eat a dollar, but hopefully I can still make my point. You can't eat Mammon. Money can't feed your belly, clothe your back, or keep you dry in a rain. No, God does that. And yes, He often provides money as a means for us to provide for such things as food, clothing, and shelter, but money is merely the means to that end, and not the end itself.

And let's be honest. How many of us, when chasing after dollars, have ever chased down enough to bring us peace? How many of us have gotten enough out of having enough to get by, without spending a lot of our time anxiously fretting about how to spend or get more? God gives us money to enjoy it, to put it to good use, both for ourselves and for our neighbor, to support our families, further the Ministry of the Word, and uphold the government. He does not give us money to worry about it. How backwards is it, therefore, that we so often turn His gift into a reason to worry, with each dollar bringing more concern about the next dollar instead of greater thankfulness for all the dollars we've received?

Imagine if I became so concerned with my weight that I decided to sit in the corner all the time and worry and scheme about how I might become thinner. How well would that work out? No, if my concern is my weight, I do best not to worry, but to watch what I eat, exercise, and pray God blesses my effort. So also, worry does nothing to put food in your mouth or provide for your family. All we can do is work and pray God to bless it, and all of us here have experienced in life how richly He does so, as none of us have gone hungry or languished in want of our daily necessities. We're here, aren't we, as living proof of that?

The Greeks had the famous story of King Midas to illustrate the danger of losing sight of the real joys of life in the pursuit of money or gold. One day King Midas found Silenus, the elderly schoolmaster and foster father of the god Dionysius asleep in his rose garden, having drunk too much wine. Midas recognized the old man and showed him mercy, overlooking his shabby behavior and showing him hospitality for the next ten days. On the eleventh day, he brought Silenus back to Dionysius. The Greek god was so pleased with Midas' actions that he promised to grant him one wish, whatever he asked. Midas famously asked that everything he touched would turn to gold, hence, the Midas touch. He loved the gift at first, but soon recognized that it wasn't all it was cracked up to be. He couldn't eat or drink without his food or drink turning to gold. He even ended up turning his daughter into gold. His blessing had become a curse. He had all the gold he ever wanted, but couldn't enjoy the simple gifts that really matter most in life, food, drink, family, and the like.

It is impossible to enjoy God's blessings when we are always longing for more. Christian contentment is the true path to such enjoyment. When we recognize that we have what we need, and even more than it, we can finally begin to appreciate, properly use, and enjoy what we have instead of obsessing about what we don't. More does not always equal more, that is more stuff doesn't always translate to a better quality of life, greater enjoyment of what you have. What good is money in the bank if it robs you of time with your family and the appreciative use of what God has given you? When we reach the point that we are waking up and working and doing whatever we do for money, we are serving two masters. No, we serve God rightly when we wake up and work and do what we do for God, for our families, for the proclamation of the gospel and the stability of society.

You don't have to break the bank to be pleasing to your God. No, He has already spent all of heaven's treasure on you, pouring out His Son in death for your life. Leave your worry in His wounds and do not be anxious about tomorrow, because tomorrow rests in the same hands that were pierced for your transgressions. Money is not evil—the money put in the plates funds gospel ministry, after all—but money is also not the be-all and the end-all. No, it is a means to an end, an instrument for service, to provide for yourselves and for others. Use it as such, and never forget who has provided it and all you have to you.

Enjoy God's good gifts as His children. That's why He's given them, for your joyful reception of them, but know that a single-minded obsession on getting robs Him of His credit for and His joy in giving to you. God has given you His Son. He will take care of the lesser things as well. So wake and work for God, your family, and your neighbor, and as you do, pray for His blessing, and know that He will provide. And as you do, don't lose the forest for the trees, *“but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.”* Amen.