

The Bible has a lot to say about money. On the one hand, it tells us that money is a gift of God. All of our possessions, all the money that we have come from his hand. We would have nothing apart from him. But the Bible also warns us that money can cause us to stumble. It can lead us away from God. Like Paul says in 1 Timothy chapter 6: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs." So money, then, or a love of money can lead us deeper and deeper into other sins. It can lead us to not pay attention to God. This is why Jesus says in Luke chapter 16, verse 13, just after our reading for today: "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." But that leads us to ask: what does it mean to serve money? What does it mean for money to be our master? And why is that so dangerous for us? To answer all of these questions, Jesus tells us the parable for today.

Jesus says that there was a rich man, and like many rich men, then and now, he owned a lot of possessions. In this case, he had a lot of land. We know this because his debtors owe him things like wheat and oil. But he couldn't be everywhere all at once, and in those days it was very common to own land that was very far away. So to take care of the daily business, the day-to-day operation, this rich man had a manager who lived on-site. Now, this manager was also the man's property, because the manager was a slave, as was common in those days. But to be able to support him and to give him all the things that he needed, the manager took some of the profits of the master's business. It was a good way of dealing with these things. He got what he needed and also what those under him needed, and the master got his property taken care of. It was a pretty good deal.

But you can imagine how easy it would be to abuse that system. The boss isn't around, after all, so why not do whatever you wanted to do? Why not increase the profits and take all of that extra money for yourself? The boss never has to know. The master's never going to find out, because he lives somewhere else. And that's exactly what had happened in this case. This manager was abusing his master's possessions. He was taking more money than he should've and making himself rich at his master's expense. And so we see, then, that money had become his real master.

Now, how did this happen, Christians? And why is this such a danger also for us? Because we can become so focused on the things of this world that we lose sight of everything else. After all, we do need things, right? We need things in order to survive. We need things like clothing. We need things like food. We need things like a place to live. If we didn't have these things, we just wouldn't live. We wouldn't be able to endure. And God has created us to work. Even before Adam fell into sin, he was working in the garden. Work is very much a part of who we are created to be. That's how God wants us to get these things for ourselves. And God even gives us pleasure in work. He gives us the satisfaction of a job well done. He gives us the joy of providing for those that we love, of providing for the needs of our family. All of this is good, Christians. It's who we are created to be.

But sin corrupts that, turns it into something else. Sin tries to convince us that, "Well, if I need this, then why not have more? And if I have more, why not have even more?" "More and more and more is the only way that I'm ever really going to be happy," sin says. "It's the only way I'm ever going to feel satisfied." And how do I get it? Through money, of course. And how do I get

money? Through working. And so we convince ourselves that we need to work longer hours, that we need to work overtime, that we need to work every single day without ever taking a break, all in this pursuit of getting the things that we need. There's no time for anything else!

But do you see how that enslaves us, Christians? Do you see how money becomes our master in the process? And we think that money is going to be a very kind and a very gracious master, who is going to give us everything that we want or need. But in reality, it's abusive, and it corrupts us into something else. Because money is never enough. We never get to a point where we say, "I have enough money. I don't need anymore." It always wants us to have more and more and more. And it leads us away from God in the process. Money can even convince us that serving God, doing what he wants, is painful and boring and a waste of time, because I could be doing something else. And so, like somebody who's caught in an abusive relationship, we just don't realize how bad it actually is. We don't see money for what it is and how it's hurting us in the process.

But Jesus goes on to tell us in the parable that this manager got caught. The master caught wind of what he was doing, and so he told him to turn in his accounts, because he can no longer be his manager. Now, you have to understand that this was a very dangerous situation for this man. He is a slave, after all. It's not like he can just go out and find another job. It's not like he can find some other way to support himself. For him to be turned out like this meant death to this man, or at the very best, a very hard life of digging or begging. And so what is he going to do, faced with the reality of his own life?

Christians, do we see how a love of money can lead us into spiritual death too? Because as Jesus says in Luke chapter 18: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Serving money leads us away from God. Serving money means that we will not enter the Kingdom. A love of money can lead us straight down into hell. Why do you think Jesus talks about it so much? Why do you think he is so serious about it? It's not a laughing matter. Greed is a deadly sin.

So what does the manager do in this case, faced with the possibility of his own death? He works to gain himself some new friends. And so taking his master's debtors, we are told, he begins to change the terms of their contract. If they owed a hundred measures of oil, he cut it in half to fifty. If they owed a hundred measures of wheat, he cut it down to eighty. Now, was that an honest thing for him to do? Of course not. He is called the dishonest manager, after all. Jesus is not saying that we should act like this. This man was still abusing his master's possessions. But remember what I said earlier, that he was gaining his own living off of this income, that the manager got what he needed from his master's money. So by cutting it down like this, he is not only hurting his master, he is also hurting himself. He is giving up on the very money that had got him into this mess in the first place. And in the process, by getting rid of these things, he found new life instead of death.

So what does this mean, then? What is the point? The manager was willing to cut off what was dearest to him. He was willing to give up on that money. Because if he hadn't done it, he would've ended up digging or begging or dead. It would've been far worse indeed. But he let it go. Even though it was like an anchor pulling him down, he let it go so that he could swim up to

safety. It wasn't easy for them to do that, though. It cost him dearly to let these things go, but he did it. Because if he hadn't, it would've been worse indeed.

And Christians, we must also be willing to let these things go. We must also be willing to turn away from the things of this world. Because money is not our master. God is our Master. God is our dearest treasure. He is worth far more than anything money can buy. Because money can't buy us heaven, but Jesus has paid the way with his own blood. Working hard is not going to get us any closer to God, but Jesus has done everything that is necessary to save us. God is far greater than anything in this world. That's why God says to us in the words of Isaiah 55: "Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food." What is better to eat, Christians, than the Bread of Life, which is Jesus Christ, our Lord? What is more delightful than eternal life with him in heaven forever? God is far greater than all the things of this world.

Yes, we still have to work. That doesn't change. God has created us to work, after all. But let us use our labor in his service. Let us do everything for him because he is our dearest Master. And let us also rest, Christians. Let us set aside our labor so that we realize that everything comes from God. And even if that means that we lose something in the process, even if that means that I don't get everything that my heart might possibly want, may we realize that we have lost nothing at all. Because God is our dearest treasure. God is worth far more than anything we might lose in this life. And God endures forever!

So Christians, let us keep our eyes fixed on God. Let us not look to the things of this world, because they will never satisfy. But let us look where true satisfaction, where true joy is to be found: God alone, who is our dearest treasure in heaven.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, from whom come all good things and to whom all things belong, turn our eyes away from the things of this world, so that we always look to you, because you are our dearest treasure. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.