

Sermon Text for November 11, 2018

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Deuteronomy 12:10-11, II Corinthians 9:6-7, Matthew 6:24-33

“Choosing our Master”

Welcome to this, well, this unique Sunday. There are so many topics of the day we could cover today. We could talk about the first week after the elections and what that means for us as Christians, but, no Scripture to go with that today. We could draw from examples for veteran's day in a church and a community where so many of us have been willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of our country. We could talk about the Bible presentations that took place today as a sign of health and vitality in our community. We could talk about the birthday of the church and the current 43 people in this church who have been members longer than I have been alive! We could talk about world and national events which seem a little more intense these days.

But instead we are going to stay on schedule as we look at our second week now to address this topic. Last week we talked about tithing as obedience and laid out a challenge for those of you who are currently not tithing to use January as a target month. We spoke about how if you are not tithing you are missing the fullness of your relationship with Jesus and I don't want anyone to miss that. The premise is that God is the giver and the originator of all that we do have so tithing is but a small act of giving back what we have already been given.

Some of you asked some logistical and practical questions such as is that 10% of what I make or what I bring home. Jesus is not as specific as we would like at times on these issues but I will say what we do, and that is what we bring home. Another question is do other charities count on giving toward my 10%? Our Finance Committee may not like this but my answer is yes, it does count. Your total giving back to the work of God on this earth should total 10%. If everyone did that there would be enough to give to everyone. I am not in the business of taking money away from people or charities.

And so we remain in Matthew where Jesus requires us, demands from us a decision on who is our master. How we answer that question will dictate how we live our lives.

READ SCRIPTURE

Let's start right off with vs.24 where we find a very well known verse where Jesus states: You cannot serve God and Mammon. He had laid the groundwork for that proclamation by stating: 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.

Mammon is not a Hebrew or a Greek word but like the word Abba comes from the Aramaic which was the local language that Jesus and his disciples would have spoken. Mammon was not a locally worshipped god, there was no god Mammon like the Almighty Dollar. It was a word that had at its root the meaning of trust. Something in which you place your trust. In Jesus' day it referred specifically to wealth. So on our money we have in God we trust, just so that no one confuses that we trust money as the name mammon seems to imply.

In vs.24 we find the basis for our sermon where Jesus says we can only have one master. We cannot have two. You can't serve part of the time one and then the rest of the time the other. It sounds very similar to Paul in Romans 6. Turn there will you. Remember, we studied Romans together not that long ago. I've been here long enough that our Scriptures are overlapping, praise be to God, it should sound familiar.

In chapter 6:18 of Romans Paul tells us "you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." We are either a slave to sin or a slave to God, says Paul, there is no inbetween. We have to choose. There is no middle of the road where you have neutrality. Jesus says here in this Scripture you have to choose between two masters.

Verse 25 starts with the word therefore and every time we see that word therefore we have to ask the question what is the therefore there for? Why is it there? The statement is made: choose between two masters, and having made that statement, therefore, we have now two options and here they are. That's what it is there for. If we have to choose between God and wealth, show me the difference, that's the therefore. Here are your choices, God provides so you do not have to worry. That is your first choice, therefore, you can choose between a God who provides or... But let's pause a little and speak about this God who provides before we look at the second option of Master under the therefore.

He then goes on and speaks about the birds and then about the lilies and they are simply powerful symbols of God's providential care. It draws us away from the frenetic activity to a calmer vision of God's bountiful care. This is laid out as the first choice, a God whose vision for us is one of calm living in the midst of a chaotic life.

The other choice is mammon. I believe the pursuit of wealth is the most insidious, what many would call the most natural, false god that we have established in our culture. Jesus knew the danger of this in our lives which is why he spoke about it all the time. It is his second most favorite topic next to the kingdom of God. He spoke more about wealth than he did about divorce, homosexuality, immigration, sex, or any other issue you want to argue about today combined. Combined.

In Luke 4:15 he states that he was anointed to preach to the poor, in Matthew 19:23 he talks about how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God if you are wealthy, in Luke 14:33 he tells us to sell all that we have and give to the poor if we want to be his disciple. Jesus has a very specific message about wealth. He calls it a false god which makes it extremely dangerous and an enemy to God.

He also states in these verses that where God provides security, wealth also provides a measurable, tangible product: and that would be worry. Worry becomes our worship of mammon. Every time we worry about money and finances it is a worship to mammon, it is an offer of praise to wealth. Worry is a form of worship to a false god. Where song and praise are our offering to God, worry is our offering to mammon. This is how we know whom we serve. If you are someone whose life is filled with worry it may be that you are in constant worship of a false god. This is true of finances, but if there are other areas of your life where your constant state is that of worry, then you are in a constant state of worshipping a false god and you have to identify that god because it is taking the place of the security that the Lord can provide.

Now, all of us I am sure would piously affirm that we have chosen to serve God, not mammon, but in our daily life, if we are honest with ourselves, it is mammon that sets our priorities and determines our choices.

It takes faith to choose a master. If you look at vs.30, and now keep in mind Jesus is speaking to a whole hillside of people and he says basically: God is going to take care of you, why is your faith too small to believe that? Jesus tends to do that, call his disciples' faith small. It is a point of frustration for him. They had gone over and over and over again the same play in practice, but once the disciples were out there in real life they deny Jesus three times, they ask Jesus to be seated at his right hand in heaven, they sell him out for pieces of silver or gold.

In Matthew alone, there are three other times Jesus asks his disciples about their little faith. Matthew 8:26 when a storm comes and he is sleeping on the boat. In 14:31 when he tells Peter to walk to him on the water. 16:8 when he is feeding the 5,000. All of these cases worry seeped into the disciples' mind, a doubt that Jesus could provide, or save, or deliver.

And maybe there was someone in the crowd on that mountain who was listening to these words and he was thinking, that person was: you know that whole thing about tithing from last week, and now this week about who is my Master, that doesn't really work. I'd rather have a little worry and a lot more wealth than try this approach. I can balance both, God and my pursuit for money. He's just playing on our emotional heart strings.

This person would leave the sermon on the Mount untouched simply because he did not have the faith he needed to believe Jesus' words. He would have been unmoved and it would have robbed him of experiencing the fullness of God's blessing.

Jesus ends these verses by reminding his listeners that they were surrounded by those who chose to worship other gods all the time. In vs. 32 he speaks about the gentiles who strive for security in material goods as a juxtaposition of our striving after God that shows which master you have chosen.

So today, on this stewardship Sunday, we are face to face with a choice we have to make. What god are we pursuing? Paul in his passage in II Corinthians gives us another measuring stick besides worry to see if we are really following God in regards to our finances. Go to II Corinthians 9:6-7. Are we cheerful givers and do we give not out of compulsion, but out of joy? Do you give as you have made up your mind to give and not because a pastor guilts you into it, but simply because it is the right thing to do?

He also says if we sow sparingly, if we hold our hand back, then that is another sign that we have not fully committed to the Master. You would be all in if God is your Master. Finally, vs. 8 we will see who our Master is because we will always have enough of everything and even then able to share. We went over those real life experiences of what having God as your master in that area of your life can look like. Real life experiences.

You know in our short time together God has made an impressive impact financially on this community, on this church and beyond. We've given close to \$1million in mission money and over \$3million in our work here to advance the kingdom of God. The potential to do so much more is there. But we can only do that if we continue to choose our Master and that begins even before 2nd grade.

All the money that we give is worth while when we read this note that a mom in our church found. Keep up the good work and choose your master wisely. Amen.