

From The Treasurer #2 – Two Masters

Matthew 6:24

"No one can serve two masters. 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 both God and money."

This teaching of Jesus has always fascinated me. I've asked myself why did Jesus speak so plainly on this. Why did He contrast money with God in such a way? Why didn't He say, "You cannot serve yourself and God"? Surely this is the clearer battle we all face – the personal repeat of the original sin in the Garden of Eden – to do what we want over God's will. Or why not Satan versus God and then contrast a life of sin over one of righteousness. Why is it that Jesus placed money squarely as an alternative master to God?

Why are two masters a problem? If you've ever worked in an organisation in one of those roles that has one boss but a so-called "dashed line" report to another boss you'll understand. I have and it's diabolical! They have different agendas; they want to head in different directions. You end up having to make choices over which one you'll please — always one, always the other or do you flip flop between? Eventually you have to make a choice for one and tick off the other. In this situation I got told if I did that again I'd get the sack — hard to love both bosses!

How can money be a master? Note the text doesn't place money as some sort of travelling companion, equal in the journey of life. Rather Jesus suggests that money is a master or, in other words, it comes to occupy that position of authority over us. Authority means that we don't have total discretion or choice — it's why we go to work or school most days — we don't get to always do what we want. How does money become a master? Well consider. Maybe we've never stolen anything because we know it's wrong. OK — so have we ever cheated on our tax return just a little, maybe inflated some work expenses? Or have we ever knowingly received the wrong change but not said anything? In these situations, money has mastered us. We've done the wrong thing and for how much — \$2, is that the price of our integrity? And we shake our heads and "tut tut" at people that rob banks! Ever worried about inviting friends around and giving them prawns and good fillet steak but when we go over their place it's spaghetti bolognese — boy did we talk about that with our spouse afterwards. Or perhaps we've lent someone our lawnmower or car and they've returned it with much less fuel. Did we forgive them straight away or did we bear some resentment for a while — if the second choice, then money has mastered us in these situations. We're getting the picture. The problem is that money isn't a good master.

In what ways does money as a master run counter to God? Let's compare:

The Life of Man	The Book of God
"I just need a little more money to make me happy"	But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. (1 Timothy 6:6–10)
"With my extra money I can employ people to help me and do all my work for me so I can enjoy myself"	Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25–28)
"If I can get enough money together I'll be secure in my retirement"	Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. (1 Timothy 6:17)
"I've worked hard — you owe me lots of money"	For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

Now I don't believe at all that the scripture is saying we shouldn't have money. For a start consider the fact that our Lord was buried in a wealthy man's tomb (Matthew 27:57). Surely if any statement was to be made on money then this would have been the time. Rather the scripture suggests that God's financial blessings on us all have a place in His plan to advance the kingdom. There are many examples in the scriptures of money being used for kingdom purposes.

Instead I believe the scripture is suggesting that it is the pursuit and love of money to the exclusion of God and His plans and purposes that is the problem. Eventually we all make a choice — often we get to make this choice repeatedly.

Choose well today, choose the Good Master.

God Bless,
Gary