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Matthew 6:24 *Two Masters*

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“Father in Heaven, we come to You in prayer now. And we give you our concerns, our burdens, the issues of our life. We pray that You will take those things which weigh heavily upon us, and that we will feel a sense of relief, a sense of hope and courage, and strength. Lord, we pray that you would manifest Yourself as God during this sermon time. In fact, we pray for a miracle. We pray that over the next thirty minutes we will be nowhere except in Your presence. And that You will teach us and speak to us the very place we need to hear. And we ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.” Please be seated.

When my Dad and Mom met, got engaged and decided to get married and went through all that process. When my Dad and Mother went to the Catholic Priest about the wedding, the Priest said that because my Dad was Methodist, that the only way that would allow my mother to get married and remain a Catholic, would be that my Dad would have to agree to raise the children in the Catholic faith. So, my brother and my three sisters and myself, were all raised to be Catholic. We grew up in the Catholic faith and learned many wonderful things about God, and learned some things that were confusing and consequently have been straightened out in my thinking. Well one of the things that intrigued me in the Catholic Church is the ritual. And one of the things that we did is when you walked through the door of our church, right on the right-hand side was a little container, a nice, decorative ball filled with holy water. And you put your finger in that holy water and you make the sign of the cross then you enter into the church showing respect and reverence for the facility.

I don’t recall if we did anything on the way out? I just don’t remember. But the holy water was an intriguing thing to me as a young boy, and I can remember in the fifth, maybe the sixth grade, discussing holy water with my friends who also attended the Catholic Church with me. The questions were something like this: “What happens if a fly gets in the holy water? Does the fly become holy, or does the water become defiled? Which is stronger, the holiness of the water or the filthiness of the fly? What if two flies get into the water? In fact, is there an accumulative affect of flies that you reach certain number of flies and the water is no longer holy?” We wondered about these things. We also wondered what happens if you see a fly in the holy water? Do you just reach in there and take it out and not tell anybody, or are you supposed to find a nearest adult and alert them of what’s happened. Also, if the fly is removed, do you then have to replace the water?

Well these were questioned we asked. And what we didn’t realize is that the church had a custodian that cleaned the church and every week would empty that water and wipe the balls clean, and put new, holy water in there because even holy water after a while would have sediment at the bottom of it. I shared that story with the first service, and afterwards a man came to me and said, “Do you know how holy water is made?” I said, “No.” He said, “You just boil the devil out of it.” Okay! Some of you have had holy water to drink I think. Well, as a boy, contemplating holy water and flies and everything associated with it, I now realize in hindsight that we spent a lot of time and energy on something that wouldn’t even last. And I want to talk to you about that today.

Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6 verse 24. We are continuing our series of teachings that Jesus has, called the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew 6 verse 24 Jesus says this: “No one can serve two masters; for either he would hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” Now Jesus is talking about money in this section of the Bible. Couple of weeks ago we discussed the two treasures – one in Heaven, one on earth. Last week we discussed two eyes, one that was good and one that was evil. This week, Jesus is leading us down a path about two masters. Two masters! Now when we read this, we are not living back in the days when Jesus spoke this, and many things have changed culturally since then. When I read this, I think immediately of two employers. And man cant’ have two employers. Well, that’s not true because you can. Many people have more than one job. And they have two employers.

This literally means serving two masters. The language used for serve, that's what a slave did to his master. So we are talking in the context of a culture where they had masters and they had slaves. Slaves were owned. Jesus says, 'You can't have a slave owned by two masters.' That would create great difficulty for the slave. By nature, he would like one more than the other. He would resent one and like the other one better. In fact, someone has said that this is the single greatest text in the Bible to demonstrate why a man should only have one wife. Well, I don't know if that's what Jesus meant, I'm not sure. But He says: "You'll love one but you'll hate the other." Your affections will be towards one but they cannot be towards both. And then He makes this statement: "You cannot serve God and mammon."

Now 'mammon' is not a term we use a whole lot today. In fact it's not used a whole lot in the Bible. It's only used in one other passage, and we are going to turn there in just a moment. But it's translated in different versions of the Bible to mean 'money, riches,' and in the Amplified Version it says, "Possessions or what you trust." So you can't be a servant of God and a servant of riches at the same time. The word, mammon, is used by Luke when he quotes Jesus in Luke chapter 16. And I'd like for you to turn there. There is a parable that we are going to find Jesus telling. And it's an interesting story, fascinating story to be honest with you, and we'll work through that. We'll seek to understand it. And then we will understand more clearly what Jesus has in mind when he says, "You cannot serve God and mammon."

Now the parable we are going to read is a parable, but it's one of the most confusing parables you'll ever read because Jesus is going to take a person who is dishonest and make him into a hero. Let's see what happens here. First we'll read it, then we'll tell a story, and then we'll go back through it. "And He also said to his disciples, 'there was a certain rich man who had a steward. And an occasion was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods. So he called him and said to him, 'what is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship for you can no longer be a steward.' Then a steward said within himself, 'what shall I do for my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I cannot dig, I am ashamed to beg. I have resolved what to do that when I am put out of the stewardship they may receive me into their houses.' So he called every one of his master's debtors to him and said to the first. "How much do you owe my master?" And he said, "A hundred measures of oil." So he said to him, "Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'"

"Then he said to another, 'and how much do you owe?' So he said, 'a hundred measures of wheat.' And he said to him, 'take your bill and write eighty.' So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly." Listen to this, "for the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon that when you fail, they may receive you into the everlasting habitations. He who is faithful in what is least, is faithful also in much. And he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust? The true riches! And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's who will give you what is your own? No servant can serve two masters for either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

"Now the Pharisees who were lovers of money also heard all these things and they derided him. And He said to them: 'You are those who justify yourselves before men. But God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.'" This is an interesting story. A man works for a wealthy man. Apparently he's been dishonest; dishonest enough that the rich man calls him to accountability. He tells him he is going to be fired. So he goes out and does dishonest things. And he is commended by the rich man for doing it; and then Jesus uses him as a model for something that the children of light should strive for saying, "That man is keener or more shrewd than the children of light." Then He goes on to say some things that are familiar to us. You

know, “be faithful in little things, and you’ll be faithful in much.” And then, He comes back to the same thing that is recorded in Matthew, “No servant can serve two masters.”

But what does this all mean? Let’s go back through it carefully because this is an important parable, an important to the topic we are studying today. Chapter 16 verse 1: “And He also said to His disciples...” Now in verse 14 it identifies that the Pharisees were listening and they were lovers of money. They heard all these things, and they derided Him. They basically are saying they stuck their nose up in the air while He was talking. They were very disgusted with Him. But this is addressed to Jesus’ disciples. This is not addressed to people who are against Him, but people who are for Him, people who are walking with Him. And He tells a story. “There was a certain rich man who had a steward.” Now, a steward is somebody who takes care of the goods of another. This man would be likened in this day as being the manager of the wealth of another individual. He oversaw all of the affairs of the wealthy man.

So he has a steward. And an accusation is brought to the rich man that the steward was wasting his goods. Something is happening; whether he is embezzling, or something, but it is wrong. And so the steward is being called in to account. Verse 2: “So he...” that’s the rich man, “...called him...” the steward, “...and said to him, ‘what is this I hear about you? Give an account of your stewardship for you can no longer be steward.’” In other words, he is saying “I want you to set the books straight, and when you are done, you are fired. It’s over.” And by the way folks, that was a mistake. Because it’s going to give the steward an opportunity to as the phrase we use today, he is going to *cook the books*. He’s going to make them look good. That’s why today, many times when embezzlement takes place, what happens is the people who own the company walk in to the person’s office and say, “Clean out your desk, you’re done, today.”

Well, “What I am going to do”, the steward thinks, verse 3. “The steward said within himself, ‘what shall I do, for my master is taking the stewardship away from me. I cannot dig, I am ashamed to beg.’” He is a soft handed, white-collar, worker. He doesn’t want to take a shovel and dig ditches in order to earn a living. “I can’t do that, and I am too proud to beg, how am I going to provide for myself? What can I do? My work here is coming to an end.” Verse 4, “I’ve resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship they may receive me into their houses.” He is going to work out a plan, so that when he is kicked out of his master’s house, when he is kicked out of the employment there, he’ll have a place to go. And here is his plan, verse 5, “So he called every one of his master’s debtors...” Now Jesus will give us an example of two, but we’ll get the picture. “...He called every one of his master’s debtors and said to the first, ‘how much do you owe my master?’”

Now, just watch what happens here. “He said, ‘a hundred measures of oil.’ So the steward says to him, ‘take your bill and sit down quickly, and write fifty.’” Now hundred measures of oil is the oil that would be received from about a hundred and fifty olive trees in a year. Its value is about three year’s wages, normal wages, so this is a lot of money. This is owed to the rich man. Now note what happens here. Who is the one that is changing the bill? The man who owes the debt, he is the one that is rewriting it, not the steward. Now the steward has the authority to accept this because he is still employed by the rich man. So he’ll accept it, and it is legally binding. But, who is responsible, the man himself who changed it in writing. This steward is very clever. It’s no wonder Jesus identifies him as being shrewd. Because what he is doing here is, he is placing himself in a situation where that man owes him. So when he loses his job, loses a place to live, he can go to that guy and say, “Hey, you remember how we worked that out, and you got all that money back? I helped you save all that money.”

That’s one thing he can do. There is another thing he can do. He can say this: “You know, do you remember when you changed that bill? I am thinking that I need to go and make that strait with that guy. But I won’t go for a certain fee.” In another words, he’ll black mail him. So this is a very shrewd individual. He is very conniving, and he

is recognized as doing that. Oh, another example is given in verse 7 of a man who owes hundred measures of wheat, "...write eighty." So we have the same thing, and that's about two thirds of a year's wages. So there is a lot of money involved here and these are just two people that are used as illustrations.

Now, verse 8, this is when the story takes a strange twist. "So the master..." this is the rich man, "commanded the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly." Now this is strange. If that was your money, would you say to the guy that you are firing, "Hey man thanks for getting a half?" "Thanks for getting eighty percent, that's great, man! That's pretty shrewd. Dude, I've never complimented you before, but I'll say this, you are shrewd; phew, good, good for you." Well that's what's happening. And then Jesus makes a statement: "For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light." Jesus is commending something here that is demonstrated in this guy's life that makes him more enlightened in his generation than the people who are trying to serve God. What in the world could it be?

Oh, we have a little clue in verse 9. "Now I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." Now, what human being can offer you anything that's everlasting? None! None can! So this gives us a clue as to what Jesus is talking about. Now remember in a parable, a parable is told to make a point. And it's not told so that every aspect of it will be taken by itself and set out here and said, "Well, this is our doctrine. This is what we believe." The question is what is the point of this parable? And really, it's pretty simple, and it's pretty powerful when we get it. It's this. Here is a man that knows everything he's got is going to come to an end. He's been told that. He's been told that it's coming to an end. Now prepare. So he is intelligent enough to prepare. Is Jesus commanding the way he prepared? No! He is using it as an illustration that this guy was diligent in preparing.

You see brothers and sisters everything in this planet is coming to an end. We've been told that. Are we preparing for that time? What's going to happen when you lose this home called *planet earth*? What are you going to do then? That's the emphasis of this parable. And Jesus is saying that the sons of the world are shrewd in their generation preparing for things to come. Are you living a life of preparation for losing all, and in fact, at that point, gaining everything because we will be with God throughout eternity? Now, this has profound application in our lives; not only with money, but in a lot of areas. Let me share one with you, and then you can make application in other areas. Jesus talks about being faithful in little things and the big things will take care of themselves. That's essentially what He is saying.

In this principle of service to God or service to the world, I want you to understand something brothers and sisters. Your home, your home is under attack. The relationships in your home are under attack. Brothers are under attack from each other. Brothers and sister, children are under attack. Anything on this planet that is not of God is attacking your home. Husbands and wives and their relationships are under attack. And it is a real fight, they are real bullets here and there are real casualties and there is real blood that is being shed. In our walking through life, in our journeying, we have a tendency to be foolish sometimes. We have a tendency to move away from the principles of God to the principles of the world. The principle of the world are temporal, they are right now, it's right here. The principles of God are here no doubt, but you really see the benefit of them later, down the road.

So when that man goes to work every day, and there is that pool of secretaries, and they all smell nice and look good, and they are acting so sweet and kindly and attentive and stuff. A man, not anchored in the things of God will be tempted. Especially when he goes home and he is not paying much attention to her, and she is disrespectful back to him. And the quarrels begin. And it becomes less and less fun to go home, and more and more fun to be around someone else. I'll tell you brothers and sisters that is temporal. That is not long term. That will not last. It is dangers and it is fraught with peril. It's fraught with peril.

So what does this parable have to do with it? When you, listen to me carefully, when you say before God and family and friends, "I do," God takes that very seriously. I do what? "I promise to love you and only you..." and there will be other things in there, "...until death do us part." God takes that serious. That's a promise you have made to Him. Now, the devil comes along and he attacks that. He attacks you. And he says, "You know, that's a, yeah, just forget about that because you are now in love with a new person." Now listen to me carefully. You are never in love with a new person when you are married. You are infatuated, you are lusting, you are never ever in love. God gives love, and He is not giving love for that.

I know a couple who basically had given up on each other in love. They just, their marriage was on the rocks, wasn't going to work. They went to a counselor, and the counselor simply said, "Look, you don't love each other, you don't care about each other, but you don't want to be divorced, so just act like you are in love." They did, and several years later they are the two cutest love-birds you've ever seen. They are in love. Little things, faithful in the little things; be kind, be polite, be considerate, be forgiving. It doesn't take a lot to improve and it doesn't take a lot even to heal when we get on God's page. And we let Him be God in our life and not a temporal, "I want this," whether it's money, whether it's position, whether it's a person, no matter what it is brother and sisters. Jesus is telling us, "You cannot serve two gods." You can't!

But if you are going to serve God, you are like this wise steward who realizes everything, everything on this planet is temporal. But everything with God is eternal; it never ends. Now let's go back to Matthew chapter 6 with these things in mind. See if we can understand more clearly what Jesus is saying. In Matthew 6 verse 24: "No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." Now for some strange reason, a concept of wealth or seeking to obtain wealth has taken negative connotations within Christianity. Now, I want you to take your Bible sometime and just casually read through the Old Testament. And you'll discover that except for a few prophets, every influential person in the Old Testament was wealthy. In the New Testament, many of the people were wealthy. But, we see Jesus with a long hair and a beard, a robe and sandals on with no home, walking around, and somehow we think, "Well, that's to be the norm."

Well, obviously we don't think that. But that's where some people are at, and then they just add a little bit beyond it. Because He says, you know, you shouldn't have a love for money. That's true, that's the root of all evil. But let me make it crystal clear brothers and sisters. Jesus was not a Marxist. He was not a communist. For a short, brief period of time in the Book of Acts, people who were without were given from people who had, and nobody went without. But that didn't last long. And that's not to be the norm. If you want to get ahead in life, you've got to work for it. You can't expect the government or the church to carry you, or somebody in the family. Paul is so bold, he says, "Look, if you are not going to work, you are not going to eat." There is nothing wrong with striving for wealth unless wealth is your god. There is much good that comes from striving towards wealth. You become disciplined, you become a person of prayer, you become a person of integrity if you are doing this for God. Plus, every success you have as a business person provides work for someone else.

I was visiting with a man this week who's done well in business. And I said, "At the end of your life, you will not seat there and say, 'look at all the things I've acquired.' You will be able to say, 'think of all the people that had employment because of the risk I took.'" There is nothing wrong with striving for wealth. In fact, I wish all of you would and I wish all of you would get wealthy. Then remember me! So let's take that off the table. The problem is, when we become a servant to it, when it owns us. But Jesus says, "Look, if you are faithful in the little things, the big things will take care of itself." Now, my wife and I know what the little things are. There are called pennies and nickels, and we've been there. For years, we had a single income, mine; one car, five people in a mobile home and a dog. And it was tight. We would do our budget, and our budget didn't include money for haircuts or clothing for

the kids, just a monthly budget. And we'll give our ten percent tithe and our ten percent offering and we'd start from there, and we went down. And every time we did the budget we'd end up crying because we didn't have enough money for food, electricity and water, and everything else. That's not including anything beyond just what we had to have.

We would take whatever, whenever we bought something we'd use cash or check. We didn't have a credit card. And whenever we had change, we'd put it in a shoe box, clink! At the end of the month it was always the same routine. We need a loaf of bread, or we need something, and we'd be digging in that shoe box. First thing I'd be looking for was the quarters; when we ran out of quarters then the dimes, and then, nickels and pennies. I can't tell you how many loafs of bread or gallons of gas I bought with nickels and pennies. I can tell you that one lady, used to cringe when she saw me come in. "Here we go!" If you and I are faithful in these little things, money, relationships and anything else we want to categorize here, are no problem! Because God will be God! And as He prospers us, and I pray that He will prosper you, it is no problem! You are able to do more. You are able to be a greater blessing to your family, to your wife, to your children, to friends and to people in need. And also, do not forget the service of God.

Wealth is not something to be afraid of, unless it owns us. Jesus' teaching today is pretty simple. We spend a lot of time and energy on some things that won't last. Let's put that energy into the things that will. And when Jesus returns, may He be the One God we are serving.