

God, Mammon, and Eternity

by John Edmiston

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Luke 16:13-15 MKJV *No servant can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (14) And being money-lovers, all the Pharisees also heard all these things. And they derided Him. (15) And He said to them, You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.*

Luke 16 is a chapter which is largely about the effect that money has on our eternal life. There are two lengthy parables wrapped around a central principle "you cannot serve both God and Mammon". The first parable is that of the corrupt steward and the second is the parable about the rich man and the beggar Lazarus who sat at the rich man's gate.

In the first parable the corrupt steward realizes that he is about to be fired. So he cooks the financial books in favor of his master's debtors so that they will be nice to him and perhaps give him a job after the steward is dismissed.

Jesus' commentary on this corrupt behavior is highly sarcastic but contains some important spiritual principles:

Luke 16:8-12 MKJV *And the unjust steward's lord commended him because he had done wisely. For the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. (9) And I say to you, Make friends by the mammon of unrighteousness for yourselves, so that when you fail, they may receive you into everlasting dwellings. (10) He who is faithful in the least is also faithful in much. And he who is unjust in the least is also unjust in much. (11) Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust the true riches to you? (12) And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who shall give you that which is your own?*

1) Money is 'the mammon of unrighteousness'. Mammon seems to corrupt by becoming "the ultimate bottom line" instead of obedience to God's commandments. (v9.)

2) Success in corruption is even commended by the corrupt - wickedness reigns. (v.8)

3) There are everlasting dwellings in Hades into which the wicked receive their own (v.9)

- 4) Corruption in a small matter (money) will turn into dishonesty in all matters (v.10)
- 5) If we are dishonest with our finances God will not entrust spiritual riches to us (v.11)
- 6) If you are not faithful in that which is another's (for the silver and gold belong to God - Haggai 2:8) how will God give you riches for eternity – riches that are truly your own?

Financial dishonesty, greed, covetousness and corruption are not small things spiritually (as the covetous Pharisees thought). Indeed they are almost matters of salvation! For the riches of heaven will be denied to those who cannot rightly handle the riches of earth.

Satan was cast out of Heaven was because of corruption in his trading practices (Ezekiel 28:18). Judas was doomed by his pilfering (Jn 12:6) and Ananias and Sapphira lost their lives when they lied to the Holy Spirit about their deceit and corruption (Acts 5:1-11). In Revelation 13 we find that the final choice will be between being able to trade (buy and sell) by accepting the Mark of the Beast or to have eternal life by refusing it. The last spiritual choice that humanity will have to make will be between God and Mammon.

In verses 13-15 of Luke 16 Jesus adds two further principles:

- 7) You cannot serve two masters faithfully – you cannot serve both God and Mammon
- 8) That which is highly esteemed among men (wealth and riches resulting from trade) is an abomination in the sight of God.

These two principles spell the spiritual death-knell for unbridled free-market capitalism. God, and not the market, should rule the life of the Christian. In the end times the free market called Babylon will be world-dominating and everything will have a price - even slaves and the souls of men. God will judge and destroy this wicked system:

Revelation 18:11-13 MKJV *(11) And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their cargo anymore; (12) the cargo of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and every ivory vessel, and every vessel of very precious wood, and of bronze, and of iron, and of marble, (13) and cinnamon, and incenses, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.*

Money is a useful servant but a terrible master and we must not serve it nor allow ourselves to be priced by it and valued by it. Our net worth is not found in dollars and cents but in how we reflect the image of God in love and good deeds.

The second parable (Luke 16:19-31) is that of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man has no compassion on the beggar at his gate but drives by each day without giving Lazarus as much as a crumb to eat. Eventually they both die. Lazarus goes to a place of comfort in Abraham's bosom while the rich man is tormented in Hell. The rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus with some water but Abraham refuses the rich man's request just as the rich man refused the beggars pleas.

Again the rich man pleads for mercy on his brothers by sending them Lazarus from the dead. Abraham refuses this request also saying that if his brothers were not able to listen to Moses and the prophets then they would not even listen to someone who rose from the dead!

This dramatic parable about the after-life is full of good and fascinating theology about consciousness after death, places of comfort and places of torment and so on - however I want to focus on the financial aspects in keeping with this study on God and Mammon.

We find Jesus stating a few more spiritual principles:

9) Our money is one of the things which we can use to show mercy or selfishness. What we spend our money on reveals our true spiritual priorities. In this case that the rich man did not care for or love his neighbor. The rich man only loved himself.

10) The manner in which we spend our money will matter on the Day of Judgment. God treats us in the same manner that we treat others. God shows no mercy to those who have no mercy. We should stop being selfish and instead we should use our money for good, kind, compassionate and loving purposes.

11) That wealth in this life does not necessarily equate with favor and blessing from God. Though the rich man was very wealthy he was not actually in favor with God. In fact ultimately his soul was damned, cursed and tormented.

12) That poverty, rejection, hardship and disease in this life does not necessarily indicate that a person is hated by God. Lazarus was in fact loved by God and he was blessed and comforted by God for all eternity.

13) That the rich have no special spiritual privileges before God, that money is of no use in the after-life and that wealth cannot purchase salvation.

14) That the poor are among us as a test of our hearts and of our obedience to God's law of love.

15) That money and wealth can blind the conscience so that people ignore the Law and the prophets in the belief that they "must be OK" because they are receiving good things in this life. This quiet, slow but sure loss of moral conscience can become so profound that they would not listen if someone rose from the dead.

The Bible does not support any of the materialistic political solutions to life (Communism, capitalism, socialism etc). In all of these political philosophies it is only power and money that rule. For these philosophies only matter matters, the spiritual is totally absent from consideration. However God's Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36) and all the things of God are free gifts received by grace without financial cost (Isaiah 55:1-3, Matthew 10:8, Luke 7:42, Romans 3:24, 5:15,16; 6:23, 8:32, 11:29, Ephesians 1:3).

What matters to God is how we treat other people and what we are like in our character! Have we become dishonest and corrupt, cruel and selfish? Has materialism warped us beyond measure? Do we no longer care about the poor? Is money all that matters to us so that it spoils all of our relationships:

Proverbs 23:6-8 ESV *Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; do not desire his delicacies, (7) for he is like one who is inwardly calculating. "Eat and drink!" he says to you, but his heart is not with you. (8) You will vomit up the morsels that you have eaten, and waste your pleasant words.*

The important thing about money is that it is a very accurate indicator of who we are deep down inside. How we spend our money says a lot about our heart, our priorities and even our spirituality. The check book tells us now what the Book of Life will tell us later.

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