

You Cannot Serve Two Masters
(Luke 16:1-31)

Jesus in this text is speaking unto His disciples about wealth and covetousness. Wealth is not sinful, but when you mix wealth and covetousness together, you have sinfulness. Covet, or covetousness, is a sin that is mentioned frequently in both the Old Testament and New Testament. It is considered a root of other serious and mortal sins. For example, Paul showing to Timothy the contrast between money and godliness said, “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:10). In a world that puts so much emphasis upon money and material wealth, we as Christians must be careful.

The word covet can be defined in many ways: having an intense desire, to be greedy of gain, or an insatiable appetite for things that are not needed. Jesus warned His disciples of this sin when He said, “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. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13). The verse is clear on the subject of covetousness, it will drain the very life out of you – you cannot serve two masters.

The two masters to which Jesus refers is God, and mammon. Mammon can mean money or any material possession. The words of this verse are strong: “No man can”, “he will”, “love”, “or else” and finally “Ye cannot”. The Pharisees, who were themselves covetous, heard all that Jesus said and they despised Him. They despised Him because they knew in their heart that Jesus was proclaiming truth – the truth that no man can serve two masters. The Pharisees, however, always justified themselves before men, but Jesus said unto them, “God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.” Jesus would not let them excuse their sin. To further illustrate His point, Jesus relates to His disciples and the Pharisees a story of two people (Luke 16:19-31). One of the men Jesus refers to as “a certain rich man” and the other as “a certain beggar named Lazarus”. From the beginning, we see a great difference between the two men. The rich man had all the comforts of life, while the beggar was laid at the rich man’s gate, sickly and begging for the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table. The beggar died and was carried by the angels unto the presence of God. The rich man also died and was buried. His burial must have been something to see. But the rich man was not interested in what was happening at his burial because he had awakened in the abode of the unsaved dead between death and the judgment (hell). No man can serve two masters.

The unnamed rich man was not condemned to hell because of his wealth. The basis of salvation is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and men are condemned for refusing to trust Christ for salvation.

The choices of this life determine our eternal destiny, and once death has taken place, that destiny is forever fixed. The rich man in our text was much more concerned about other things, he given little thought of dying – this is apparent from the text itself – he had not taken time to prepare. Jesus said, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his

own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul” (Mark 8:36-37). I feel sure the rich man could see no harm in what he was doing. The harm however, was not in his riches, but in leaving God out of his life. His attitude of material gain had blinded his soul of the greatest need that he had. Namely, salvation! Jesus warned, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). An insatiable appetite for material gain is a dangerous thing. There is far more to life than having material things.

It may be hard for us to understand, but covetousness can blind people so that they lose all sense of purpose. Jesus tells us of this in Luke 12:16-21: “The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” After these words, Jesus goes beyond the scope of the rich man, and applies the thought in words that say, “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.” If there is one tool that Satan uses with great success in our generation, it is the tool of covetousness.

Paul said, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich [live for riches] fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Timothy 6:6-9).

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