Empire Church of the Brethren

Sunday Service Sermons

08 November 2026

The Great Impossibility
Text: "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." *Luke 16: 13* from *Luke 16:9-13*.
Jesus never uttered anything more absolute than: "You cannot serve God and mammon."
He spoke of this as the one who knows the secrets of life itself.
The language of the verse calls for some explanation.
"No person can serve two masters."
Is that a truth?
Can a person not work at two jobs and thus serve two masters?
In our modern world many people do this.
However, the word "serve" here means to serve as a bond slave.
The master in this case is more than a boss: he is a lord, an owner.
What are we to understand by mammon?
Our English word has been brought into our language from the Greek text.
The Greek word was probably derived from the Hebrew word for that which is trusted, that is riches, wealth, material things.
But now our Lord says that we cannot be a servant of God and a servant of riches at the same time.
Our nature precludes serving God and gold.
As the creator of humans, Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves.
In human nature one's heart follows one's treasure.
In a very practical passage, Jesus instructs his disciples to make sure that they place their treasure in heaven, and he warns about earthly treasures.
He warns that at their very best they are perishable.
Then he gives the reason it is so important to have one's treasures in heaven, "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."
It's just human nature that one's interests and devotion follow one's treasure.
When Jesus talks about treasures in heaven, he is not speaking of material wealth.
We do not accumulate material wealth to be received later in heaven.
Our Lord himself is the great treasure of heaven.
His instruction is that we so use the material things we receive on earth in the service of Christ that when we get to heaven we will receive his approval and blessing.
It is a matter of having Christ, not the riches of the world, as the first love of life.
Your heart is going to follow your money.
If you put your money in the stock market, you develop an interest in the stock market.
If you put it in the service of Christ, you will be interested in the welfare of the kingdom of God.
You are so created that your heart will follow your treasure.
Dividend devotion leads to darkness.
The other fact about human nature that our Lord puts before us is that attempts at divided devotion produce confusion and darkness.

“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light.”
Our Lord is using a parable that relates the relationship of the eye to the body.
If you have good eyes, your body will be full of light.
If you have blurred eyesight, your body will be full of darkness.
In the spiritual life singular devotion is to the spiritual life what good eyes are to the body.
But an attempt at divided devotion is what bad eyesight is to the body.
“If your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!”
It may be that our Lord is using the illustration of a cockeyed person.
He would be saying that if you are a person who is trying to keep one eye on the Lord and another eye on the things of the world, you end up not seeing anything correctly; you get everything in life out of perspective.
It is simply human nature that we cannot live successfully with a divided devotion.
Conflicting demands preclude serving God and gold.
The word Jesus used for “master” emphasizes that he is Lord.
He views mammon as a competitor with God for the place of lordship in our lives.
We might have expected that he would present Satan as the alternative, but he knew that Satan gains control through fronts.
Satan rarely ever bargains for control personally; instead, he uses good things.
We must not understand Jesus to be saying that wealth and riches are evil in themselves.
God is the creator of all the gold, silver, oil, and land in the world.
He declared that everything he made was very good.
Mammon is evil only when we allow it to be the lord of our lives.
Both God and gold demand first place.
Jesus says, “Seek you first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”
God will not accept a second place in your life.
Mammon says, “If you want what I have to offer, you must be willing to set your goals high and pay the price.”
Both God and gold demand total allegiance from you.
You can give total devotion and first place but to one lord at a time.
If God has first place, then gold does not.
If gold has first place, then God does not.
You can determine which is first with a little reflection.
Which determines your decisions, your relationship to God, or your desire to make money and get things?
Both God and gold demand complete trust.
They also are in conflict because they both demand complete trust.
God says, “Trust in me and I will see you through all of your difficulties.”
We may be placing our trust in mammon without realizing it.
In which do you have your trust today?
A little reflection will help you determine the answer to this question.
If your family gets into a financial pinch, which is cut first, your contributions to the work of the Lord or your insurance premiums?
Which would be the more important matter to you, keeping your insurance current or your tithes?
I do not discount the importance of a good insurance program, but surely God is more to be trusted than our insurance program.
It is so easy for us to unconsciously begin to trust in mammon rather than God.
God and gold conflict in the values they thrust upon us.

When you look at another person, what do you see?
How do you evaluate that person's worth?
Do you value them on the basis of their relationship to God or on the basis of how much of this world's goods they may have?
Are you more interested in them if you find out that they are an oil mogul or that they are the president of a successful corporation?
It is so easy for us to accept the values of mammon and to evaluate others by the standards of mammon rather than God's.
What would it take to make you absolutely happy?
How much would that happiness, as you see it now, depend on mammon?
How much of it would be related to God?
Do you not see that God and mammon make conflicting demands on our lives?
You cannot have both of them as master of your life.
If you make gold the center of your life, you have thereby excluded God.
Almost all of us have made a decision about this matter at some point in our lives.
In our profession of faith and baptism, we declared that we wanted God to be first in our lives and that we wanted only one Lord.
The question we must face this morning is, Have we changed this decision?
How we are treating the wealth we have is a good sign of who is lord.
When Jesus is Lord, our wealth is used in this service and the support of others.
Scriptures on how to lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven: *Proverbs 19:17*, *Matthew 25:40*, *Luke 12:33*, *Luke 14:12* f., *2 Corinthians 9:7*.