

**SCRIPTURE TEXTS:** Joshua 24:19-25; Matthew 6:24

**SERMON TITLE:** Two Masters

I know what it's like to try and serve two masters. It's an experience I had at the beginning of the 7<sup>th</sup> grade back at Thomas Jefferson Jr. High School in my hometown of Beeville, TX. I was signed up to play in the band. My parents had already bought me a snare drum. And I was looking forward to learning how to be a drummer.

But I had also signed up to play football. It's something I had wanted to do since I was little kid—and the Jr. High counselor had told me that I could do both—so I did. And for awhile it worked until the day came when there was conflict between the two. The football team had a game while the band was scheduled to march in a parade. So there I was trying to serve two masters, but it just wouldn't work. I had a choice to make. I resolved that one particular conflict by choosing the band.

I then went and talked to the coach about my dilemma. He told me I had to make to choose between the two. I couldn't do both. Now I resented the fact that I had to make a choice because I really wanted to do both. So I agonized over the decision until I finally chose to stay with the band. No one can serve two masters.

But I'll be honest with you, even though I learned that lesson a long time ago, I still have trouble putting it into practice, especially when it comes to making the choice that Jesus puts so bluntly before us: The choice between God and wealth.

The word translated **wealth** in this text is actually the Aramaic word **mammon**. It refers to both money and possessions—our accumulated resources if you will. Or, as one pastor puts it: *The word **mammon** means “stuff,” as in, “We have a lot of stuff around here.” Or “Please go*

*into your room and pick up all your stuff.” Or closer to the point, “You cannot serve God and stuff.”<sup>1</sup>*

And do you see what Jesus does with the word mammon? He uses the word to speak of ***mammon*** as a rival god—which makes our service to this god-like stuff a form of idolatry.

Well, the truth is, I do try and serve both God and my stuff. How do I know? Well, it’s simple. I acknowledge God. I call myself a disciple. I gather with you each week to worship God. I study the scriptures. I pray daily. I serve in the church as a pastor. And yet, when it comes to dealing with my stuff—with my money—with the stuff I possess—God has very little influence.

When I look for example, at everything the New Testament has to say about wealth—about what life looks like when we serve God rather than our stuff--my life seems out of sync. I’m not living like that!

And I recognize that to the extent my life falls short, I’m using my stuff as a substitute for God. I’m looking to my stuff to provide security and happiness and power. It’s no accident that when I start feeling a little depressed, one of my first reactions is to go buy something in the hope that it’ll make me feel better! It’s no accident that I have so much fear around the thought of giving stuff away—even of giving to the church. I worry that the more I give to the church or to the poor the less I’ll have for me—and I don’t like that! It makes me anxious.

So you see, even though I know better, I’m trying to serve both ***mammon*** and God. And I know what the choices are between the two. Pastor William Carter puts it this way:

***Mammon says, “Keep busy, work harder, earn your own way.” God says, “Come, all who are heavy-laden and I will give you rest.”***

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<sup>1</sup> Carter, William G. "Marvelous Mammon." Speaking of Stewardship : Model Sermons on Money and Possessions. By William G. Carter. New York: Geneva P, 1998. 83.

*Mammon says, “Worry about your wealth, hover over the investment portfolio, act prudently.” God says, “Loosen your grip, let go of it all, and get in step with Jesus.”*

*Mammon says, “Stash some money for a rainy day.” God says, “Who do you think sends the rain?”*

*Mammon says, “Keep what you can to maintain your life. Grip it tight and don’t let go.” God says, “I will keep you.”*

*Mammon says, “Do not rest a minute. Keep looking over your shoulder.” God says, “I brought you out of slavery. I have set you free.”*

*Mammon says, “There is no such thing as a free lunch. You have to pay as you go.” God says, “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Come, eat and drink! Be satisfied by a table you did not set. Be nourished by the body and blood [of the one] who gave himself up for you.”<sup>2</sup>*

My brothers and sisters, I know that it’s impossible to serve two masters. I learned that lesson a long time ago. But when it comes to God and wealth, I’m still having a hard time serving God. I want to serve both God and mammon. I don’t want to choose between the two. But the one I call Lord says: Choose—either God or your stuff. So I ask you to pray for me that I might choose God.

The thing I love about Consecration Sunday—and the thing that I hate about Consecration Sunday—is that it provides all of us with yet one more opportunity to choose God rather than *mammon*.

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<sup>2</sup> Carter, William G. "Marvelous Mammon." Speaking of Stewardship : Model Sermons on Money and Possessions. By William G. Carter. New York: Geneva P, 1998. 85.