

20.01.2018 GOD OR MAMMON

“Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father”. Philippians 2:9-11.

Last week we saw that Satan’s kingdom runs on the principle ‘I see, I want (desire), I take’. In contrast, God’s Kingdom runs on the principle of self-giving love. Yet God too wants His people to ‘see and desire and take’. What are we called to see and desire and take? We are called to ‘look upon Jesus’. We are commanded to desire His Kingdom and His righteousness. And we are called to take all that God gives us as free gifts – Creation, Redemption, Salvation and eternal Life.

“Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.” Isaiah 45.

“Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith...” Hebrews 12:2.

“Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.” Matthew 6:33.

“We all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:18.

God or Mammon

“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.” Luke 16:13.

“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.” Matthew 6:24.

The word ‘mammon’ is an Aramaic word meaning wealth. In the above 2 verses it is personified and opposed to God.

The Bible is not against wealth or fame. Many in the Bible were either rich and/or famous e.g. Abraham, Joseph, Job, David, Solomon, Daniel. What God is concerned about is the proper use of wealth and fame. In Old Testament times, the civil laws God handed to Moses provided for the poor and made certain that there was no inter-generational poverty. Every 50th year was a year of Jubilee when bonded slaves were set free and property was restored to the owner. Leviticus chapter 25 has detailed instructions to the people on this matter. The Levites of the Aaronic priesthood received no land, but had a far greater gift, for the service of God Himself was their inheritance (Joshua 18:7). The promise to us, who are a royal priesthood, is found in Philippians 4:19.

In the New Testament Jesus mixed with the rich, the famous and powerful. But most of His ministry and time was spent with ordinary people. Whilst idolatry had been the major sin of the Jews in the Old Testament times, Jesus knew that money and wealth would become the new idolatry – it would replace the wood and stone of the idols they had previously worshipped. So He taught and warned His followers to make God their supreme priority.

Our study this week explains the choice we have: *shall we choose spiritual riches in Christ or shall we choose the riches this world has to offer?*

Our decision has eternal consequences:

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21.

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Mark 8:36

Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, "Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." And they were greatly astonished, saying among themselves, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible." Mark 10:23-27.

Making the Choice

Human beings tend to make choices that they hope will benefit them in the long run. Our decisions decide our destiny. Since choosing between God and Mammon will have eternal consequences, we need to ask ourselves the question *'Which choice will bring me eternal joy and eternal life?'*

Sometimes the answer is clear, as in choosing between God and Mammon. But we hesitate, because we do not LIKE to do God's will. We do God's will out of duty, because we are asked to do in the Bible. But how many of us can honestly say, *'I love to do God's will; I desire only to lay for myself treasure in heaven, not trust to riches here on earth?'*

When we find it impossible, Jesus promises us that everything is possible with God; if we submit our wills to Him, He will make us willing to do His will.

We learn to cheerfully obey those we love; so also as we learn to know who our God is and His great love for us, we will desire to obey Him and lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven. (Jesus gives us a glimpse of what laying up treasure in heaven involves in the story of the rich young ruler found in Matthew 19:21, Mark 10:21 and Luke 18:22).

"Sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me."

Jesus does not call every one of us to sell all that we have. But He does want to have the first place in our hearts, for when He comes first, we will always do His will and never hesitate to do what He asks of us.

How does Choosing God become easy?

How do we make God first in our lives? It is by knowing who we are (self-knowledge) and knowing who God is and what He has done for us. His loving-kindness draws us to Him.

I must recognise that *in myself* I am nothing in the sight of a holy God. And that everything else - my riches, my fame, my talents and my intelligence, *'is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord'* *Philippians 3:8 (NLT)*.

In contrast:

God is my Creator. *I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvellous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well... in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. Psalm 139:14-16*

God is my Redeemer – He has chosen me for Salvation. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself...Ephesians 1:3-5*

God has a plan for my life. *For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jeremiah 29:11*

You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you...John 15:16

God cares for me personally. *Not a sparrow falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Matthew 10:29-31*

God has an eternal future for me, free of the penalty, the presence and the power of sin. *"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life." John 5:24*

Conclusion:

The God we worship is worthy of our worship; He is worthy of our trust. We are His by creation, redemption and re-creation. Let us trust Him to the uttermost to provide us with the riches of heaven (His righteousness) and our daily bread here on earth.

Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or parents or brothers or wife or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who shall not receive many times more in this present time, and in the age to come eternal life." Luke 18:29, 30

For Reflection:

1. What is my attitude to money?
 - a. If I am already rich or earning an income that keeps me comfortable (compared to the poor), do I live a simple life so that I may give generously as the Spirit guides me?
Am I rich in good works, not just rich in material wealth?
If I am generous by nature, is my giving just impulsive or guided by the Spirit?
Am I willing to 'have all things in common' with my fellow church members? Acts 2:44-47
Am I proud, using the power that is associated with wealth to get my own way?

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. 1 Timothy 6:17-19.

- b. If I am genuinely poor (a low income) am I content and confident that because I am God's child, He will provide me with all that I need (Psalm 23:1, Psalm 37:25)?

Do I still try to help others out of the little that I have? 2 Corinthians 8:2, 3

Do I give for the work of God? Luke 21:1-4.

Am I constantly envious of the rich and seeking ways that I and my family can become richer?

Do I look for money-making schemes and/or choose my children's careers in light of how rich it will make them without listening to the Spirit's guidance?

I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. Psalm 37:25

And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

2. What is my attitude to fame?

- a. If I am not famous, am I envious of the famous, including any church members that are famous; envious of the power they have in the church and particularly their wealth if they are wealthy as well?

Have I forgotten that my glory lies in knowing God making Him both Saviour and LORD in my life?

- b. If I am famous in the society I live in, do I use that fame to get my own way in the church and in society? Have I forgotten that my only glory should be in Christ and Him crucified?

"Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD, exercising loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD. Jeremiah 9:24.

Everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Philippians 3:8 (NLT).
