

Cliffhanger
“God or Mammon?”

Introduction: Over the past several weeks, we have become familiar, all too familiar, with the term “fiscal cliff.”

- ✓ Used by politicians on both sides to elicit fear of the future and to seek political party loyalty
- ✓ On both sides of the political aisle are individuals who seek to manipulate and control their respective constituencies
- ✓ At the very core of our country’s fiscal cliff, is a total abandonment of biblical principles in regard to stewardship
- ✓ We are Kingdom people, followers of Christ
- ✓ A follower of Jesus not only confesses faith in Christ, touts spiritual gifts, and quotes scriptures, they also align themselves with the principles of biblical stewardship
- ✓ Over the next three weeks we will explore those principles and seek to apply them in our own life circumstances
- ✓ Teaching comes from the words of Jesus on the Mount of Olives, the Sermon on the Mount, or the “Discourse on Discipleship.”

There is an ancient Eastern parable titled “The Wealth Is Nearer to You Than You Think”. It tells of a wealthy merchant who had undertaken a lengthy journey, carrying with him his most valuable jewels. Along the way, another traveler befriended him, making it look like a chance meeting but with the sole intent of laying his hands on those precious stones. At the end of each day when they arrived at a local inn they would share the room for the night. As was customary, each received his mat and pillow and also a wash basin with a towel for his nightly ablutions. The merchant, somewhat suspicious of his newfound friend’s real motives, devised a scheme to safeguard his valuables that was to leave his ill-intentioned companion completely befuddled. Before they turned in for the night, he would graciously offer the would-be thief the privilege of washing up first. As soon as the thief would leave the room, the rich man would take his bag full of precious stones and hastily hide it under the pillow of the thief. When the thief would return, the rich man would make his exit, taking his turn at cleaning up. Awaiting this moment of opportunity, with predatorial glee the rogue would plunge into the rich man’s belongings, rummaging through his bag, even ransacking in and under the rich man’s pillow, feverishly searching for the precious stones. His frenzied and fruitless attempts at every stop left him utterly frustrated, and eventually he would lay his sleepless head on his pillow, angry at his failure to locate the treasure. Finally, as it came time to part on their last day together, the rich man began his farewell pleasantries and, to the speechless astonishment of his companion, informed him that all along he had been painfully aware of his real motives. Then came the agony-inflicting revelation: - You poured all your energies into looking everywhere - except under your own pillow. The wealth was nearer to you than you realized. -Ravi Zacharias

Subject before us: Will we serve God or Mammon?

- ✓ Mammon refers to material wealth
- ✓ Not always spoken of as evil, simply the substance of our material possessions
- ✓ The idea set forth in this text is that to think we can serve both God and possessions is an illusion. One will be your true master and direct the course of your life
- ✓ Furthermore, unless you consciously choose to serve God, you will by default, serve Mammon

Why should we choose to serve God and not Mammon?

- ✓ Abstract theological/ethical argument?
- ✓ Or good personal reasons for doing this?

Jesus provides two:

I. Two Treasures

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21 NKJV"

NOTE: Jesus is not against laying up treasures for yourselves, per se, the key is laying up the right kind, because the stakes are high.

A. Treasures on Earth

1. Explaining the metaphoric picture

- a. People often put storage boxes of money in house or under house (so thieves could not steal)
- b. Clothing that was expensive could be corrupted by moths
- c. Precious metal could rust

2. What this metaphor does not mean

- a. Does not mean to not make more than enough to just get by

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. 1 Timothy 6:17 NKJV

- b. Does not mean to not worry about prudent financial planning

Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, 7 Which, having no captain, Overseer or ruler, 8 Provides her supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. 9 How long will you slumber, O sluggard? When will you rise from your sleep? 10 A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep —11 So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler, And your need like an armed man. Proverbs 6:6-11 NKJV

3. What this metaphor does mean

- a. Don't seek material wealth by hoarding large amounts or by amassing lots of material possessions while it is within your power to care for others
- b. By amassing way beyond what you really need "pleonexia"-greed-the insatiable desire for more

(ILL) Jesus illustrated the folly in this parable

And He said to them, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." 16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. 17 And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' 18 So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.'" 20 But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' 21 "So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Luke 12:15-21 NKJV

4. Why Jesus warns of amassing earthly treasure...

- a. Wealth is ultimately impermanent
- b. May be lost in a variety of ways (inflation, stock market, bank scandals, war, ill health, taxes, etc.)
- c. Can mitigate those with wise investment/insurance, but any of us can be wiped out in a second
- d. Even if you avoid being wiped out-its all gone when you die

The alternative?

B. Treasures in Heaven

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. Matthew 6:20-21 NKJV

"So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." Luke 12:21 NKJV

How do we lay up treasures in heaven?

1. By establishing a priority relationship with Christ

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life. Matthew 19:29 NKJV

2. By seeking godliness

Exercise yourself toward godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. 1 Timothy 4:7b-9 NKJV

3. By serving and giving to other people

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. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 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 NKJV

- a. Giving to those in need
- b. Giving to advance the Kingdom

THIS IS A TOTALLY SECURE INVESTMENT

- ✓ No one can take it away
- ✓ Will await you with interest in heaven
- ✓ Can accumulate as much as you want regardless of your financial resources

II. Two Eyes

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! Matthew 6:22-23 NKJV

NOTE: The Parable

- ✓ Eye, though a small organ, is the key to the operation of the rest of your body (fix a meal with eyes closed, play golf)
- ✓ The condition of your eye powerfully effects the well being of the rest of your body
- ✓ The treasure you seek will powerfully effect the well-being of the rest of your life
- ✓ It will determine your ultimate wealth in the next life, but also the quality of your life in this one

- A. If you have a bad eye (seek material wealth) it will give you the illusion of being enlightened-but will lead to greater darkness and misery

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 NKJV

*Seeking material wealth always disappoints

Or consider these conclusions by David Myers, *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty* (Yale University, 1999), who studies the correlation between material wealth and happiness.

From 1960-1993, real income in America doubled-but during that same time the divorce rate doubled, teen suicide tripled, juvenile violence quadrupled, and unwed births quintupled. Although the average American has more money today, there is "less happiness, more depression, more fragile relationships, less communal commitment, less vocational security, more crime and more demoralized children."

- B. A good eye is developed by seeing God and pursuing spiritual wealth

1. Not a suffering or trial-free living
2. More progressively satisfied and fulfilled

Conclusion: The Thesis

"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 NKJV

NOTE: This isn't simple or all at once

Self-Assessment Questions

1. Which treasure are you seeking? Which master are you serving? Which God do you love?
2. What comprises your dreams and aspirations? Are they dominated by material things or by spiritual growth or service?
3. Whom do you admire and want to be like?
4. Who are your closest friends?
5. How regularly and generously do you give your money to God's service?
6. Are you content with what you have materially, or do you always itch to have more because you are bored?
7. What do you do with your spare time? Invest in family, church, ministry, or TV, shopping, hobbies?

8. How do you view retirement? A time to focus on material enjoyment or a time with greater freedom to serve God?
9. Is your excitement about God and outrage about materialism increasing or dulled?