

“The Masters We Serve”

Matthew 6:24

6/13/10

Genesis 1:27-28

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Joshua *“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

You who have graduated are in such an exciting time in your lives. You are heading in different directions, pursuing different goals and dreams for your lives.

Maybe you don't really have any idea what you want to do. Don't stress about it—just continue to talk to God and others around you that you trust and it will come.

But everyday, starting right now, you, along with all of us, have the decision to make as to who you are going to be. Maybe you've heard some people say that “now you're entering the ‘real world’”. Well, I would say you have always been in the real world—you know what pressures and relationships are like and have already had to make important decisions.

It's just now all that continues to happen in new ways, different ways, with some more responsibility added to it as you get more out on your own. So keep building upon what you've learned. Because there are definitely a lot of things and people of this world that will vie for your attention.

Always remember these words we heard this morning from Scripture.

God blessed us, called us good, made us in His image. He called us to have dominion over every living thing.

God, humans, all the things of the earth.

But then we flipped it upside-down: Earth, humans, God, so now instead of us having dominion over all things in relationship with God, all the things of this earth have control over us, as God has become just another piece of all this puzzle.

Instead of dominion—caring for and tending to all living things of the earth—stewardship, we have turned to abusing all this for our own desires. Thus, ultimately becoming slaves to the very thing we were entrusted to care for. Just look at the oil spill in the Gulf.

So enters Jesus, giving us Life back, and calling us back to our one true Master, our Lord God.

It is the choice, because that's what it is, choice, as to

Whom we will serve: Mammon—all the things of this earth, or God—our Creator where true freedom lives.

It's the choice we all have to make, just as Joshua did that day with the Israelites: As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

Not my self, not the culture around me, not any other thing, but God alone.

This is about the freedom we have in Christ, from anything or anyone else that might control you. Because you will be a slave to something—someone or something will control your life. We'll hear more about that in a minute. But today we hear our call to choose slavery to righteousness and be free.

Because as Jesus said in Matthew 6:24:

No one can serve two masters.

No one.

You see, I think the problem is that often we don't believe Jesus when He says that. Not that I think He's trying to deceive me, but I think I am the exception to the rule.

Joseph said it well as we talked about it this week: We think, "God, why don't you let me win the lottery or get rich somehow. Give me wealth, because I will know what to do with it. I'll do good with it. I'll handle it, unlike other selfish people out there."

Right.

Jesus said no one can serve two masters. "Well, Jesus, have you met me? I am the ultimate multi-tasker!"

You know what I mean. Now I wear more hats than ever: Pastor—which means theologian, counselor, administrator, caregiver, teacher, writer, speaker, event planner; Husband; Dad; Son; Friend.

"You see, Jesus, I am not one of the 'no-one's' you talk about. I can serve a lot of people."

In our multi-task oriented world, where we are driving a car while eating a burger, texting, and listening to music, that mind-set gets built into our lives, and there we run into trouble. This is not a car we can steer with our knees.

Because the truth is, we as humans have tried to do this all throughout time—serve more than one master. And it just doesn't work. Jesus said, no one can. On the surface it seems we are just enjoying the ride. While deeper there is something or someone else other than God truly driving us.

Why can no one serve two masters? Let's believe Jesus for a minute here. Why can't we serve two masters? You can't serve God and mammon.

Jesus said you'll end up hating one and loving the other. Why? Because Jesus is talking way deeper than just multi-tasking. He is talking about:

Who or what has control over your life?

What defines who you are? What is guiding your decisions?

2 Peter 2:19: *"For people are slaves to whatever masters them."*

If I make myself a slave to wealth, or anything else for that matter, when God comes into the picture and wants to do something different, or asks me to give or sacrifice somehow, it really becomes inconvenient. It messes up my groove. Because:

God and the world have conflicting purposes.

I mean, we hear these words from Jesus right in the middle of His Sermon on the Mount, which is in Matthew 5-7. Take some time this week and read that. Everything Jesus says goes against the natural thinking of the world.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are those who mourn...Love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you...Don't give for the sake of receiving praise from others...Don't worry about money and clothes...Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven."

I could go on. God's ways are not the world's ways. So if I am mastered by anything else than God, it will be in conflict of God's purposes because I will be controlled by that.

Tim Keller offers this potent definition of sin: "Sin isn't only doing bad things, it is more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God. Whatever we build our life on will drive us and enslave us."

For example:

“If you center your life and identity on your spouse or partner, you will be emotionally dependent, jealous, and controlling. The other person's problems will be overwhelming to you.

“If you center your life and identity on your work and career, you will be a driven workaholic with no real depth.

“If you center your life and identity on money and possessions, you'll be eaten up by worry or jealousy about money.

“If you center your life and identity on pleasure, gratification, and comfort, you will find yourself getting addicted to something. You will become chained to the "escape strategies" by which you avoid the hardness of life.

“If you center your life and identity on relationships and approval, you will be constantly overly hurt by criticism and thus always losing friends.

“If you center your life and identity on religion and morality, you will, if you are living up to your moral standards, be proud, self-righteous, and cruel. If you don't live up to your moral standards, your guilt will be utterly devastating.”

That's why Paul says in 1 Corinthians that you can do good things, great things, move mountains with your faith and give everything you have to the poor, but if it's not done in love it is worthless. Because God is love, and we must be completely given to Him, or else other purposes, other motives, creep into our actions.

What masters do we serve?

I think our masters fall into either self, society, or situations.

Self: desires, emotions, approval—**all those things that control us from within.**

We all have all kinds of dreams, hopes, fears, emotions, insecurities, weaknesses, things that can take control over what we do.

Think about how silly the statement is: “I have mastered my self.” Self-mastery. I'm not talking about self discipline, because first of all that is one of the fruit of the Spirit. So that in itself is from God.

No, I mean, when you hear people talk about mastering one's self, one's desires, in the sense that I alone can achieve that from within myself.

You cannot be slave and master to the same thing. If you “master” your self, then it is still your self that is driving your actions. And so you enter into the infinite cycle.

That's like saying an instrument can play itself.

“Look to your inner being for answers,” we hear some say. How can you look to your inner being for answers when your inner being is what's wrong?

That's exactly why we are called to die to ourselves, finding true life in Christ. We heard it last week, Jesus' words that:

If you save your life you will lose it, but if you lose your life in Christ, you will save it.

It's the only way to freedom.

Are we perfect in living that out? No. Will our passions and desires and all that still get a hold of us at times? Certainly. But that is not ultimately your master. You are no longer enslaved to sin, but free.

Romans 6:14: *“For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”*

What other masters do we serve? How about:

Society: social norms; approval; what others say is good or right; money; status—**all those things that control us from without.**

Jesus talks about this status thing in society. He was teaching a crowd one day and called out the scribes and Pharisees—the religious leaders—and how they love to get all the attention and honor. They love their titles—Rabbi. “Pastor Pete, what an honor!”

But Jesus says, in Matthew 23:8: *“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi’, for you have only one Master and you are all brothers and sisters.”*

We can quickly become slaves to the opinions of others. Because we all want approval, to know we are accepted and have purpose. But:

Your identity has to come first from God, and then you will be accepted and respected for the right and good things of who you are.

Yes, and then there are many situations we find ourselves in everyday.

Situations: We are controlled by the situations we find ourselves in when we feel powerless over them.

Slavery.

I recently saw a documentary on slavery in America, at a specific plantation in Louisiana. It was showing the slave quarters and of course how badly they were treated. An excellent point was made about the slaves being powerless in their situation. And so many of them turned to voodoo to try and maintain some kind of power over their masters. If they could curse their masters it gave them some sense of control, some feeling of power when they had none.

It made me think: When a person is powerless, if you don’t rely on God for what you need, you’re going to turn to something else.

There are going to be times you feel powerless over your situation, what it may be—a difficult person, an illness, loss of job, your own issues you can’t seem to get free from.

And that is why, the final master we serve, the One and only we must serve with utter abandon, is God.

Spirit: When we are controlled by God we are truly free.

Why?

Then it is love that drives us. When I fully trust that I am loved by God, completely in the hands of my Redeemer, I am not chained to my emotions, but free to love and forgive the hurting person. I am not chained to temporary fixes, but free to fully live into the reality before me. I am not chained to fleeting success, but am free to give and improve the lives of others, thus reaching ultimate success.

Choose this day whom you will serve. *“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

Amen.

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee.