



Worship – Part 33
Acts of Worship – Part 21
Worshipping God with Our Treasure – Part 5
GCSP – 01/12/2008

Do you remember back in your high school or college days having a school that was your arch rival? The last of the three high schools I attended was called Glenbard North. Our natural rivals were Glenbard South, Glenbard East, and Glenbard West. The days prior to competing against any one these schools, was intense.

If you can't remember back that far and you follow professional sports, think of your team's most hated rival. For Bronco fans that would probably be the Raiders and if you grew up as a Bears fan like me, that would definitely be the Packers. If you are not into sports then think about the democrats versus the republicans, or the Hatfield's versus the McCoy's, or the Catholic's versus the Protestant's in Ireland.

Rivalries only exist when you have two opposing views or forces and you have chosen sides. You can't be involved in a rivalry if you are sitting on the fence. Rivalries can become very heated over the years; some are justified and worthwhile but others are downright ignorant and foolish.

My sermon tonight deals with a very real and a very intense rivalry. It is a rivalry that takes place in the hearts of men and women. This rivalry is just and righteous but unfortunately far too many Christians are on the wrong side.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 6**.

Matthew 6:24

Let's pray.

Last week we learned that the Lord is the One who owns everything in this world and it is He who gives us the power and ability to earn money. He strongly warns us to never make the mistake of thinking it is in our own strength and ability. We cannot claim possession of any of the wealth we do have; it's not ours to possess. We are to depend upon Him and Him only for all of our needs. The trap we all too often fall into is leaning on and depending on our money, our possessions, and our ability to earn and make money. We lose sight of the fact that it is all God's and all His doing.

We spent the bulk of our time last week looking at a passage in **Proverbs 8** which showed us very clearly that God desires for us to possess a portion of His wealth. In the context of the passage some of that wealth is not of this world but some of it definitely is. The passage then gave us several qualities or characteristics that we must develop in our lives to be better prepared for if and when God would see fit to bless us with a portion of His material riches.

We prepare our hearts and minds for God's blessing by hating **evil, pride, arrogance,** and the **perverted mouth**. I took you through several practical examples of how we may struggle with these issues and in fact do not hate them as we should.

We then read that when we need **counsel, wisdom, understanding,** and **power** we must go to the Lord instead of the world; for He is all of these things. We must always go to Him first. God is not our last resort He is instead our first and only true resource.

We then read of how true leadership (**reign**) and **justice** come from the Lord. We must be careful that we are not depending on the latest trends and corporate fads to teach us leadership and we must not take our own form of vigilante justice when we have been offended or harmed.

We also must **love** God and we must **diligently seek** Him. We must love Him so much that everything we do, say, and think, is in accordance with His Word. We must love Him so much that we willingly yield our will and our desires to His, in utter and complete submission. Most Christians throw up a quick selfish prayer to the Lord and if the answer doesn't come before we say "Amen" we move on to other man-made solutions. Diligently seek Him and don't give up until you find Him if you truly desire to prepare your hearts and minds for His blessing.

As we have already alluded to, we must understand that He is the source for **riches** and **enduring wealth**, but we must also notice He adds the qualities of **honor** and **righteousness** to the mix. We cannot separate one from the other.

I then asked if it is wrong to have money; and the answer is of course not, it is just wrong to love money and it wrong to have an unhealthy attitude about money. Money is a gift from God. Unfortunately, as with every other gift from God, this world has perverted the use of His gifts. And even more unfortunately, the church has by and large followed the lead of the world in how we use, or more accurately, abuse, this gift.

We then looked at four biblical principles for acquiring and accumulating money. We are to work, save, plan, and protect. And we found several verses of Scripture to verify God's plan for us to acquire and accumulate money; as long as we have the proper heart attitude about it.

I then closed last week with four questions to ask yourself in the event you find yourself short on money:

1. Do I really need it? Am I short on money because of something I want or is it truly something I need?
2. Is God testing my trust? Have I been putting my trust in riches and so the Lord has diminished those to remind me that my trust is to be in Him?
3. Did I misuse what He gave me? Have I failed in the aspects of working, saving, planning, and protecting what He has already blessed me with?
4. Have I violated a biblical principle in my life? Is there unconfessed sin in my life in regards to money and possessions?

The Bible shows us that being stingy, hasty, stubborn, lazy, or indulgent, leads to poverty; so our financial shortfalls at times could be due to one or more of these sins.

In our passage this evening, we are given one of the great rivalries that take place in our hearts and minds: the serving God versus serving money and possessions.

The King James Version of the Bible translates the end of **Matthew 6:24** in this way: "**Ye cannot serve God and mammon.**" Before the most recent update of the NASB in 1995, it also used the word "**mammon.**" Most modern translations simply settle for the word "**money.**" And while the definition of the Greek word includes money it also includes possessions, ownership of land and houses, and anything else money can buy. The Greek word was actually transliterated when the Bible was first translated into English; meaning the translators created a new English word because there was no equivalent English word that would do the trick.

In essence, the rivalry we are talking about deals with serving God versus serving all of our stuff that money affords us. Jesus is speaking to us about a battle for our affections. The battle is real and the battle has dire consequences in our spiritual lives. And Jesus lays it on the line by giving

us an either or choice: you will either serve God or you will serve your money and possessions; there is no middle ground.

To further emphasize this, Jesus goes so far as to say that those who serve their money and possessions will actually hate and despise God. This is strong language. Quite honestly this is very disturbing language. Jesus cannot possibly mean that does He? If Jesus did not mean what He said, that would make Him a liar; and we all know that Jesus cannot lie. So let this truth from the mouth of our Lord and Savior sink in. Think about the times in your life when you pursued, and served, and loved, money and possessions; and realize that at those times in your life you were actually hating, and despising God. That's not what I say, that's what Jesus says.

The last two times I preached on this current series we looked at a passage just prior to this verse in **Matthew**.

Matthew 6:19-21

Simply stated, heaven is the rival of earth, and money is the rival of God; riches and material possessions are God's rival in the hearts of men and women. The pursuit of the almighty dollar has become an idolatrous religion in our world. Possessions and net worth is the ultimate end in this religion. It is blasphemous to see so-called Christians pursuing riches with such a preoccupation and passion that has never surfaced in their pursuit of God. They are serving and worshipping the idol of material wealth. They worship the creation instead of the Creator.

Read **Romans 1** again sometimes and you will see how mankind rejects the worship of God and instead worships all manner of created things. The end result of those who pursue these idolatrous relationships is that God eventually turns them over to their sin.

As believers we are called to be faithful to and preoccupied with God. It doesn't matter and it shouldn't matter how much we have or don't have. All of our stuff is in some way part of the creation, and when we serve our stuff we are being victimized and deceived by the god of this world; which is Satan and his evil world system.

It is subtle. We progress through life with the notion that we must make something of ourselves and for ourselves. As young men and women we get married. We don't make a lot of money due to our lack of marketable skills and inexperience but we manage to get by. As we mature and develop our job skills we begin earning a higher income. We have children and need to increase our income to keep up. We eventually get promoted into increasingly higher paying positions and start to accumulate and enjoy many of the world's pleasures. We level out at a particular lifestyle and somehow sanctify that lifestyle as where we belong or deserve to be. In our minds it becomes God-ordained that we should live at this level or better and when things get tight we assume God is somehow required or committed to fix things.

My wife has an expression she uses several times each week: She says, "I am spoiled rotten; you spoil me so much." And I admit that I am guilty of spoiling her; of treating her like a queen. And I enjoy doing it because of how much I love her but I wouldn't like it if she began to expect everything or take for granted what I do for her.

On a much deeper and higher level, this is how God feels about us. He has spoiled us rotten. He has blessed us and given us so much because He loves us; and He enjoys blessing us. God derives unthinkable joy from blessing us and giving us money and possessions, but the Bible teaches us that we are to be content with the bare minimum of food and clothing; anything else we receive is purely a gracious work of God and is beyond anything we have a right to claim.

We truly need a drastic paradigm shift in our thinking. God does and will bless us beyond measure when we are diligently seeking and pursuing Him but we have no right to think that our standard of living in this country is the norm or minimum we should expect.

Let me ask you a few questions to further this point: Has there been times in your life when your income has been significantly lower than it is now? Has there been times in your life when you lived in a lesser house or neighborhood than you do now? Has there been times when your cupboards and refrigerator have been emptier than they are now? Have you ever been behind on your bills? Have you ever avoided answering the phone because you knew it was the collections department from one or more companies you owed money to?

And while some of these things may still be true for you today, all of us can look back to a time when we had far less. So let me ask you one more question: Did you survive that time in your life? So as unpleasant as those times may have been, you know you can live on much less.

We must be careful to not always be looking for more and more or we will find ourselves on the wrong side of this rivalry. We will find ourselves on the side of earth instead of heaven and on the side of money instead of God.

So how do we respond to money? How do we handle the Money God gives us in a biblical manner? How do we cultivate the proper attitude and relationship with money?

God has given us the right to have money and material possessions. He has given us the right to enjoy the things that money can buy. He has given us every good and perfect gift for our benefit and for His and our enjoyment. He has determined for some to be rich in this world and for some to be much less than rich. And He has given us the means to increase what we do have. I developed these thoughts last week.

So let's spend the rest of time we have this evening, and probably the next week or two, developing a biblical attitude and perspective about the money and possessions God chooses to bless us with.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Ecclesiastes**.

Ecclesiastes 5:10-12

v. 10

If your attitude is one of loving and pursuing money you will never be satisfied; never! The lust for money is insatiable. Enough is never enough when you are pursuing money; there will always be the desire for more. If you have a thousand dollars in the bank, you think you'd be happier with two thousand. If you have ten thousand, you want twenty thousand. If you even had a million, you would want two million; if you love and pursue money.

Solomon says it is vanity; and vanity means empty or useless. The Bible tells us that Solomon not only was the richest man of his time but that no one will ever surpass the amount of wealth he possessed on this earth; not Warren Buffet or Bill Gates or some middle eastern sheik. So when Solomon says that the pursuit of money cannot be satisfied we should listen and believe what he says.

This verse also tells us that even if you have reached a level of wealth that you are able to live off the interest or income from that wealth, you will never be satisfied with the return you receive. Again, this is if you love or are preoccupied with the pursuit of money; if you are serving mammon.

v. 11

When you accumulate and have a lot you are required to build bigger houses and install all manner of security devices and even hire people to watch and protect all that you have. We have all heard the phrase, "It takes money to make money;" Solomon is telling us that it costs money to keep money. It is a vicious cycle. It is a consuming cycle if you let it.

The only advantage to accumulating treasure on this earth is to be able to look at all of it. We spend absurd amounts of money on things that have absolutely no use or function other than to be looked at, even when we aren't wealthy. How much more so for the wealthy? Solomon doesn't mince words; he calls the kettle black. What real advantage is there in accumulating things here on earth?

v. 12

The pursuit of wealth and serving the god called mammon brings with it stress and discontentment. Your sleep will be restless. Your mind will be tortured like the slave that you are; always thinking about keeping what you have and accumulating more. You can't trust anyone. Your friends might not really be your friends. You read into every word people say; thinking they are trying to get your money.

But the "**working man**," as Solomon calls him, sleeps peacefully even if his stomach is empty. In another of Solomon's writings, he has this to say about the man who is pursuing God's wisdom instead of pursuing money: "**When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down your sleep will be sweet**" (**Proverbs 3:24**).

The pursuit and love of money has been the ruin and the downfall of people from the time mankind has been walking this earth. For money, Achan brought defeat to Israel's army and the death of him and his family. For money, Balaam sinned and tried to curse God. For money, Delilah betrayed Samson and ultimately slaughtered thousands of her people. For money, Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit and died on the spot. For money, Judas betrayed Jesus.

That is not very good company, but this is the company of those who love and serve money.

The wrong attitude about money will lead you to forget God according to **Proverbs 30:8-9**. You will believe that you are the one who caused all of this blessing to come your way. You will believe that it was by your intellect and your might and your personality and charisma that you accumulated this wealth.

The wrong attitude about money can cause you to stop trusting God according to **Job 31:24-28**. You will put your trust in your riches. Instead of praying to God about your problems you will throw money at them to make them go away. You will handle everything on your own instead of relying on God.

The wrong attitude about money will cause deception in your life according to **Mark 4:19**. The love of money will cause you to be more susceptible to deception. The things of this world will entice you more easily. The lies of Satan will be as truth to you and the truth of God's Word will be unfruitful to you.

Mammon is a hard and brutal taskmaster. Mammon always requires more than you can ever possibly give. Mammon is never satisfied with what you acquire. Choosing to serve mammon is just flat out insane, yet people are lined up at mammon's door begging to be allowed the privilege to serve him. And all the while, God is softly calling out, "**Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light**" (**Matthew 11:29-30**).

How utterly foolish it is to choose to serve a brutal taskmaster over a loving Savior, yet it happens all the day long. Beloved do not be deceived; do not be duped; do not be taken for a fool. Serve God. Be content. Take His yoke upon you. As the song accurately says, "You gotta serve somebody;" make sure the one you choose to serve is the Lord.

Let's pray.