

Matthew 6:19-24

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

Dear spiritually and materially blessed children of God,

It wasn't too long ago that someone asked me what seemed to be a simple question. They asked, how many ears of corn normally grow in each corn stalk? I told the person that I didn't really know the answer – because I was a city person -- but I said I always thought that many ears of corn grew on each corn stalk. What would you say? How many ears of corn grow on a stalk of corn? Since I didn't know I thought that I better go and ask the expert, so I went and asked one of our members here at ST. Luke's who plants and grows corn ever year how many ears of corn did he expect on each corn stalk. Maybe most of you already know this answer, but he told me that normally there is one ear of corn to each stalk, but sometimes there might be a very small second ear. I couldn't believe it. I never knew that until I asked someone who was the expert.

How many times in life are things that we don't know the answer to, unless we go to the expert who gives us the correct answer? Most likely this has happened many times in our lives. Today, we are going to talk about God's gift of money and how we as God's children are supposed to use God's gift of money. But I think that many of us would have to admit that we don't really understand what God has told us about the use of money in our lives. That is why we will ask the expert. No, the expert is not me or Pastor Schultz. The expert is our God and the place where we find the answer is in his holy Word. So our theme for this final Stewardship sermon will be:

Theme: What Does God Say about Money?

- 1. According to his Law**
- 2. According to his Gospel promises**

While this sermon will most certainly talk about how we are to use God's gift of money, we really need to back up a few steps and look at the big picture. We first of all need to recognize where all the blessings that we enjoy have come from. I don't think that too many of us here this morning would disagree that everything we have and own is a gift from God to us. In his mercy and grace he showers blessings upon us that we are truly thankful for. BUT!

There is always the but that follows, isn't there? Most of us gathered here today know that all things come from God, BUT we all still have a sinful nature in our heart that at times forgets where everything has come from. Our sinful nature is looking to use these gifts of money and material blessings to serve ourselves

and ourselves alone. Our sinful nature fills our heart with worry and greed when it comes to using our many blessings from our God. Our sinful nature gets our hearts sidetracked so that God isn't always first in our lives. What we need to make very clear today is that we are not condemning anyone who has been blessed with material blessings, nor are we telling you that you need to give all these blessings back to St. Luke's. No, today we want see the dangers that can come from money and the blessings that can flow as we use God's gift of money.

Jesus wrote in our text a couple warnings about money and the blessings of this world, **“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”** As we said before money is not really the problem. It is our attitude towards money that we need to watch out for. Jesus says that we cannot have two masters. We think back to the 1st Commandment that we all have learned so well. You shall no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear love and trust in God above all things. Maybe I will expand this a little further and I will ask you what does the what does this mean for you as a child of God. Maybe you can remember the verse from Matthew 22 that says **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”** The 1st Commandment means that we will put God first in our lives at all times and in all places and this would include when we are talking about money.

What does it mean to have other gods? Our text tells us what it means. **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”** Most of us think about idols and one of the first things to pop into our heads are the false gods that other religions have and that would be correct. But as our text today says, gods can come in the form of silver or stone or they can be fuel injected or big-screened. False gods can be fancy pieces of paper that are guaranteed by the US government. It is very true that the world that we live in does not make it easy to keep God as number one in our lives. Satan will use anything within this sinful world to dominate our hearts and minds. He will use anything that this world has to offer to lead our hearts and minds away from God and to something else. Simply said, anything that leads us to take our eyes of faith off Christ and to give our time, effort and money to something else in front of or in place of our true God is a false god. If we make anything of this world our final treasure, we have been led astray.

This also applies to the bringing of our thank offerings to our Lord. Let me ask you a question, what is the difference between coming to church and giving our offerings? Absolutely nothing! They are done for the same reasons. Coming to church and bringing our offerings are both acts of worship. I think sometimes we miss that point. With our offerings, we are telling our God how thankful we are for the many gifts that God has given us. Although we know that God doesn't need a single bit of our money, we are using our offerings to say to God that this is a token of our love to you. Please except this financial gift as an act of the love in my heart.

The problem is that our sinful nature is fighting this wonderful act of worship that happens when we bring our offerings. Our sinful nature would like to get by with as little as possible. The prophet Malachi describes it this way when he talks about the Old Testament Israelites who were trying to skimp when bringing their thank offerings to God, **“You place defiled food on my altar. “But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’ “By saying that the LORD’S table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the LORD Almighty. “Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?”—says the LORD Almighty.”** (Malachi 1:7-9) Malachi is reminding us that God doesn't want us to just go through the motions of bringing our offerings any more than he wants us to just go through the motions when we come to church each Sunday. The act of bringing our offerings or coming to church

means nothing if they are not connected to our hearts which are eager to praise and thank our God for all has done. God calls any offering brought with the wrong attitude wicked and evil. When we bring our offerings, if our heart is not engaged, then the offering is not pleasing to God.

God clearly condemns our unfaithfulness whether it is being unfaithful with our time, talents of money. God reminded the rich man who trusted his money that his heart was far from God. God reminds us in our text for today that we cannot serve God and money. God reminds us that **“where your treasure is there your heart will be.”** If our hearts are glued to our money or any other false god, then that is putting God in second place. As one of my Professors once said, God will tolerate many things, but second place is not one of them. We cannot let our hearts forgot what is truly important for our eternal welfare.

That is why we need to see what guidance God give us on how to use the gift of money according to the many gospel promises that he has given us in his Word. The primary goal of talking about Christian stewardship is not to make everyone feel guilty. Don't get me wrong -- guilt is part of it. When the crushing blow of God's law condemns us, we should feel guilty for all the times we have placed other things in front of God. If we don't feel guilty, then our hearts have not been thoroughly crushed yet. But if all we tried to do was get people to feel guilty, then we are not doing everything God wants us to do when it comes to teaching Christian stewardship. That would be stopping short of what is truly important.

The goal of stewardship is to let the gospel promises shine bright and clear so that we as sinful and condemned people can see the bright shining gospel that takes away the guilt of our sin and changes our hearts and lives. Stewardship is all about letting the gospel move and motivate sinners like us to live our lives to worship our good and gracious God. Money is just one small portion of the life of a Christian. It is always good to remember that using the gift of money is not better act of worship than using God's gifts of time and talents. They are all important in our lives as Christian stewards

But let me ask you one more question, Why do so many people including people here at ST. Luke's say that Churches only want my money? Is it because we talk about money too often? If I looked back over the sermons of the last year, I would think that only a small portion of our sermons would have been about money. So that doesn't seem like a good answer. Is it because people have forgotten where their money and came from and what God has said about money? I think that this might be closer to the truth. If I took all the passages that the Bible has that talk about money, we would see that it is quite often. Like any other sin, the abuse of money needs to be addressed because we have hearts that are still sinful. It is that clash of the Old Adam and the New Man that leads people to say that churches are only concerned about money. It is the Devil working very hard to think that it is my money and not even the Church or God can tell me how to use it.

And maybe we need to break it down even a little further. Ask yourself, Why did you bring an offering today? Why do you put your hard earned money in the offering envelope? And how did you come to decide what you would put into your envelope this week or any other week? If the main reason that you brought your offering today was so that St. Luke's could meet its budget, then we might have forgotten that the real purpose of our offerings is not to support a Church but to thank and praise the God who gave us all our blessings. And if we don't really know how we came up with the amount that is in our offering envelope then we might have to admit that we weren't really giving this gift from the heart but out of habit or to pay the church bills or a sense of obligation – none of which would be proper reasons.

So back to the real question. What does God say about the gift of money? When we as lost and condemned sinners are led to believe that every one of our sins has been paid for and that eternal life in heaven is ours as a free gift from God, our hearts and lives are changed. The Holy Spirit is now working in our hearts and minds. The Holy Spirit is filling us with his power to live our lives to serve and praise him in all that we say and do – which includes are use of the blessing of money. God gives us guidelines as we

think about our offerings. As you have looked in the bulletins the last couple of weeks you may have noticed some guidelines that God has set forth when it comes to looking at our use of God's blessing of money. These are not my guidelines or the church's guidelines. These are God's guidelines for us.

The Bible clearly points out that God is looking for regular, proportionate, cheerful, firstfruit, and generous blessings to our God. But the difficult part as you look at these guidelines is that none of them tell us what amount to return out of love and thanks to our God. We live as New Testament Christians which means that God doesn't tell us exactly what amount such as 10% or a set amount. Each person sitting here today has the privilege and opportunity to let the Gospel love of God move their hearts to set whatever amount they want to give. In Christian freedom we are free to give what we have decided in our hearts after prayerful consideration. What you have decided to give is between you and God. All God is looking for is that we give regular, proportionate, cheerful, firstfruit, and generous blessings to our God.

Again in simple terms, God is reminding us to give in proportion to the blessings that he has given to us. All of our gifts should be given regularly and generously out of love to the God who has given us everything. I would encourage each of us to go home and take a closer look at the material blessings that God has given to us individually. Using God's tools of the God's Law and Gospel see if our hearts have truly been filled with love or have we not always looked at our gifts as an act of worship. On our own, we can't make these types of decisions and that is why God asks us to look to him for the trust, strength and love to bring our offerings to our God. With this in mind, I encourage each one of you to come to God's house regularly to have your faith fed and to give you the strength and motivation to grow in your love to your God and in your Christian giving. And I pray that God would continue to lead you to see that that at times you haven't always put God first, but God's saving Gospel continues to forgive us and strengthen us as we seek to serve our God. As our text says, let everything in our lives show that we are serving our God first and foremost in all that we say and do. Amen