

**Psalms 113** - Praise the LORD!

You who serve the LORD—praise!

Praise the LORD's name!

<sup>2</sup> Let the LORD's name be blessed  
from now until forever from now!

<sup>3</sup> From sunrise to sunset,  
let the LORD's name be praised!

<sup>4</sup> The LORD is high over all the nations;  
God's glory is higher than the skies!

<sup>5</sup> Who could possibly compare to the LORD our God?  
God rules from on high;

<sup>6</sup> he has to come down to even see heaven and earth!

<sup>7</sup> God lifts up the poor from the dirt  
and raises up the needy from the garbage pile

<sup>8</sup> to seat them with leaders—  
with the leaders of his own people!

<sup>9</sup> God nests the once barren woman at home—  
now a joyful mother with children!

**Luke 16** - Jesus also said to the disciples, "A certain rich man heard that his household manager was wasting his estate. <sup>2</sup> He called the manager in and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give me a report of your administration because you can no longer serve as my manager.'

<sup>3</sup> "The household manager said to himself, What will I do now that my master is firing me as his manager? I'm not strong enough to dig and too proud to beg. <sup>4</sup> I know what I'll do so that, when I am removed from my management position, people will welcome me into their houses.

<sup>5</sup> "One by one, the manager sent for each person who owed his master money. He said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' <sup>6</sup> He said, 'Nine hundred gallons of olive oil.'<sup>[a]</sup> The manager said to him, 'Take your contract, sit down quickly, and write four hundred fifty gallons.' <sup>7</sup> Then the manager said to another, 'How much do you owe?' He said, 'One thousand bushels of wheat.'<sup>[b]</sup> He said, 'Take your contract and write eight hundred.'

<sup>8</sup> "The master commended the dishonest manager because he acted cleverly. **People who belong to this world are more clever in dealing with their peers than are people who belong to the light.** <sup>9</sup> I tell you, use worldly wealth to make friends for yourselves so that when it's gone, you will be welcomed into the eternal homes.

<sup>10</sup> "Whoever is faithful with little is also faithful with much, and the one who is dishonest with little is also dishonest with much. <sup>11</sup> If you haven't been faithful with worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches? <sup>12</sup> If you haven't been faithful with someone else's property, who will give you your own? <sup>13</sup> No household servant can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

## Sermon

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit: Amen.

On days like today, when Jesus says stuff like this, I have to wonder whether we want Jesus involved in our lives. I wonder because, well, sometimes God's honesty is just too demanding. "You cannot serve God and wealth." And isn't it interesting that this isn't a command from Jesus, but just an observation of reality. Even so, we often experience it as not just a demand, but as a demand that leads to our condemnation. We want, at times, to say, "You don't understand, Lord. I **can** serve two masters! There's no competition between God and country, God and family, God and money." Our sense of life is that we can multi task anything. We believe we can multi task God. But we know, somewhere within us, that that's simply not the case.

If I say the word “side hustle” to you, does it mean anything? Seriously! Have y’all heard that term before? (Note responses). Side hustles are common for millennials in the United States, though not just young adults have side hustles. They’re not restricted to a particular race or culture or political preference or socio-economic bracket. Side hustles are the other jobs that people do, most often part-time or contract work, sometimes because they want to make more money, but most often because it’s something they love to do. A number of people drive for Uber or Lyft as side hustles. Some have Etsy shops where they sell homemade goods. Some do odd jobs from Craigslist or sell stuff on Ebay. Consultants, adjunct college professors, farmers market stands, and a host of other types of jobs might be side hustles. Whatever they are, what makes a side hustle is it’s secondary nature. It’s not the main event, but the side show, because even if you love your side hustle

more than your full time job, it's not your full time job. It's not your first responsibility and you can't treat it that way. Your side hustle is not your first priority that takes the majority of your time.

How often do you treat God like a side hustle? Like something you love, for sure, but something you don't really have much time for? Something that's lower on the totem poll than country, than family, than money. If we're honest with ourselves, this probably happens more than we'd like to admit. It might even be our default position. And that's precisely why Jesus says you cannot serve God and wealth, because when we try to multitask God, God becomes the side hustle instead of the main attraction.

Take Jesus's parable for example. The manager, whose job it was to properly run his boss's estate, serves his desire to acquire money before serving his master's interests, before doing the job for which he was hired. The manager

squandered the responsibility given to him and embezzled money meant for his master. This parable's a hard one to interpret because there's no good character. The manager is clearly a bad dude since he's clearly abused both his master's trust and the money of those in debt to the master. What we do know, though, is that he was dishonest, and that's the key. His desire for money, for personal gain, led him to be dishonest both with his master and with the land's tenants. The manager lied to those under his authority and to the one with authority over him, all because his priorities were out of whack. He was serving wealth rather than his master.

That's the danger that the parable reveals. Money's meant to serve God's purposes, but if we treat that tool as a master in our lives, then we've fallen into a dangerous idolatry. It's dangerous because of its seductive lies. Money seems to equate to security, to prosperity, to joy; you know,

those things that only God truly brings into our lives. Money makes these attractive promises, knowing all the well that it can never come through on the promise. The more that we serve money, the more we expect money to master us, to give us what only the Good Lord may give us. But money is no good lord.

This isn't ultimately a question of stewardship, but a question of loyalty, of expectation. To what, or whom, do we owe our allegiance? What, or who, do we expect to save us from ourselves, to give our lives meaning, to help us thrive? Jesus is emphasizing the danger associated with pursuing money, with loving money, with giving money power in our lives. And the same is true of anything else we allow too much influence in our lives. God and money, God and job, God and country, God and family can't be on equal footing, because as soon as we place something next to God on the pedestal of our lives, then we've made

it our idol and lowered our Lord. If we equate God with any other thing, we end up idolizing creation and demoting our Creator. We look to creation as though it were a Creator, to the imperfect as though they were infinite perfection.

What's the point of all this? God can't be a side hustle for people of faith. We might try to treat God that way, but as soon as we do, we put something else in God's place. And that's just not fair. Not to God. Not to ourselves. Not to whatever or whoever we've deified. Most things in life aren't mutually exclusive options. It's possible to be a chef and an Uber driver, an office manager and Etsy retailer. But it's not possible to serve God equally with any other thing, because only God gives meaning to all things in the world. The self-sacrificial way of Jesus and the goal of accumulating personal wealth are simply not compatible. American exceptionalism is inconsistent with the radically inclusive way of Jesus. Love for the Body of Christ is meant to be

something categorically different than family loyalty. And yet, love for God gives meaning to our money, gives us hope for our country, gives us strength for our families.

So, yeah, I wonder whether we really want Jesus involved in our lives because, well, the life Jesus calls us to is one that requires something significant from us. There's a question of loyalty before us. Who will we serve? To whom will we devote our lives? If we intend to serve God, that means that everything else in our lives must come in order behind the Lord, must fall under our allegiance to Jesus. And that's a hard teaching, not only to hear, but more so to practice.

But what if the reason it's so hard to hear this is because we're coming at it from the wrong perspective? What if we're hearing this as a disparaging law instead of an explanation of the natural order of things? What if we're hearing condemnation when in fact it is pure Gospel? When



we hear that we can't serve God and money, perhaps what we're intended to hear is God speaking this: I know money has let you don't time and again, as have many other things in life and the promise of God is that you don't have to serve those fickle masters. The oppression of the peso, the condemnation of the dollar, the yoke of the yen, whatever currency it is that bears so much weight in your life that it works you to the bone and consumes every last nightmare? That tyranny can be thrown off. We can see it's worth for what it is: a tool for our use, but surely not a carpenter, and most surely not the creator of all things. We're seeing a hard truth but a good truth, that we can't have divided allegiances, because that division causes more strife than success in our lives, and this awareness just may lead to actual liberation from the alliances that cause so much grief and pain in our lives.

The good news is that there's a master who truly wants what's best for us, and what's more, is actually able to help that come to be in our lives, and what's even more than that, wants to help us. We've been disappointed time and again by money. So often, we feel like there's not enough money, and when money comes in, demands come from every direction: Spend! Save! Invest! But when we place that influence under the lordship of Jesus, then money no longer lords over us that hideous strength of weary, tiresome pursuit of more. Instead of serving our own selfish purposes, or that shrewd master of wealth that tries to work every ounce of strength and every drop of sweat out of our bodies, we may instead find the easy yoke and light burden of our true master, of our one Lord, Jesus.

That's good news because that's the proper order of things. The one who created everything that exists is the Lord of our existence, and if we recognize that, if we

embrace God as God, everything else comes into place. Money stripped of its unjust rule becomes a tool for God's purposes. If we avoid worshipping people and instead worship our creator, we see sinners becoming saints. If, instead of venerating our country, we follow the lead of the Lord who created all nations, then we might see the Kingdom of God take hold both here at home and across all borders.

That's the Gospel. Most everything that we've worshipped falsely, all that's seemed so frail, can be redeemed in the presence of God, and even more than that, God is at work redeeming it already. It's not up to us to make it happen, but instead to recognize God's work and God's place as, well, God. If even this dishonest steward can learn to use money in ways that bring relief to others, that create community, that follows the will of God, how much more can we, God's children, use the gifts God's

given to use to serve God's purposes in the world. God's no side hustle. Money is the side hustle, and so is job, and family, and country, and everything else that exists, all things that we love or are good gifts from God, but not one of them is God. God is the main event that gives all these things meaning, and the world will only make sense if we let God be God. Amen.