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No one can serve two masters.

What does this mean to serve two masters? Well, sometimes translations can give a different degree of forcefulness. Instead of it saying no one can serve two masters it should have translated, "No one can be a slave to two owners."

In the days when this was written, it meant a slave and a slave was not a person but a thing. They had no rights of their own and their owner could do with them what they wanted. Slaves were living tools. Their owners could sell them, beat them, throw them out, even kill them. Every moment of their life was to be dedicated to their owner.

Here then is our relationship to God. God is the undisputed master of our lives. We need to do what God requires of us. As Christians, we have no time off from being Christians. We can't say, "When I get done with what I want to do, I will do what God wants me to do." Being Christians is not a part time job.

All things belong to God. Psalm 24, "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it." Then in Matthew, Jesus tells us of the landowner who gave his workers talents for their labor, or the landowner who gave his workers the vineyards. Men and women can buy and sell things and alter them in some ways, but they cannot create things. All things are created by God and he has ownership.

Jesus taught us that people are more important than things. If possessions have to be acquired and large amounts of money acquired, and all of this at the expense of treating people as things, then these are all wrong.

In Britain, people were treated as things during the Industrial Revolution. Children were forced to work for 16 hours at a time in the worst of conditions. In 1833 there were 84,000 children working in mills and mines. The children were used as laborers because they needed cheap labor. The weavers of Burnley and the miners of Staffordshire were not making enough profit so they used children in the mines and in the factories.

Wealth isn't the root of evil; it is the love of wealth that is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people with wealth think they can buy their way out of any situation. Wealth becomes their measuring rod. Wealth becomes their one desire, their weapon. Wealth and money and material things are not a sin, but it is a grave responsibility to pray that they be used as God would want them to. Did they gain the wealth by legitimate means, not at the expense of others? Now how do people use these possessions? Maybe they don't use them at all, just keep them.

Robertson Nicoll's father was a minister and made very little money but he purchased 17,000 books. He didn't use them he just collected them. A waste, as they do no one any good if they are not used.

Some may use their wealth selfishly and buy bigger things for themselves, or they can use their wealth to bribe others, to do things they shouldn't. Some will use their wealth for the support and happiness of others.

The thing is wealth is not needed to do for others. We will not go wrong if we use what we have to bring happiness to others. As Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) It is characteristic of God to give; and if in our lives giving always ranks above receiving, we will use correctly what we possess, however much or however little it may be.

St Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, spoke of this in today's lesson: Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they should be found trustworthy. The Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive commendation from God.

Matthew goes on to say, "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?"

Jesus tells us that God gave us life and we can trust him to give us lesser things. Food to sustain us and garments to clothe us. He will give us what is necessary to support life. Jesus tells us that to worry is pointless. Worry is a distrust of God.

We need to use our past as a guide for better action in the future and not something where we brood ourselves into a lack of action. A father told his son who was going out on his own, "The thing to do is to hold your own end up, and remember the biggest troubles you have to face are those that never come." It is Jesus' advice that we should handle the demands of each day as it comes, without worrying about the unknown future and the things which may never happen.

A story from Johann Tauler:

He met a beggar and said, "God give you a good day, my friend."

The beggar answered, "I thank God I never had a bad one."

Then Tauler said, "God give you a happy life, my friend."

"I thank God," said the beggar, "I am never unhappy."

Then Tauler asked, "What do you mean?"

"Well," the beggar said, "When I have plenty, I thank God; when I am hungry. I thank God; and since God's will is my will and whatever pleases him pleases me, why should I say I am unhappy when I am not?"

Tauler then asked the man, "Who are you?"

"I am a king," said the beggar.

"Where then is your kingdom?" asked Tauler.

The beggar answered quietly, "In my heart."

Almighty God, help us to live happy lives, doing for others as you would want us to. Give us an understanding of your love, your understanding and your forgiveness of ourselves and others. Help us to see the needs of the world around us.

Amen