

*Mary Craig Ministries, Inc.*

*Series: "The Kingdom of God"*



*Message: "Jesus on Wealth and Loyalty"*

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Jesus has a lot to say about both wealth and loyalty. He doesn't condemn private property. He doesn't call for communal living. He does condemn greed and covetousness, and He does expect people to respond to God's grace by sharing with others.

Jesus does question oppressing the poor in the process of acquiring wealth. He doesn't say material things are inherently evil. He does warn that money and material goods can easily become idols and that the pursuit of Mammon can take priority over loyalty to God.

The question is: Where do our loyalties lie? What will master us? What do our days reflect as to whom we are serving, and thus worshipping? We'll explore six dangers of mammon which can undercut our allegiance to the KOG and to Jesus, its King.

1. **The Strangler:** In the parable of the seeds, the seed is the Word of God. Its growth symbolizes the emergence of the kingdom. The seed that falls among thorn bushes is choked. Luke 8:14; Mark 4:18, 19; Mt 13:22. The seeds sprout. There is growth and some new life. It is thorns that quickly smother vitality. And what are these thorns? They are the cares, riches, and pleasures of life and they can suffocate the plants. The word is "choked." Spiritual life is gagged. There is no harvest. What might these cares, riches, and pleasures of life include? These, Jesus says, can abort the kingdom's growth and divert us from its true ministry and spoil the harvest. How might we gauge this in our lives? Should we look at how we spend our money? How we spend our time?
2. **Worry.** Wealth can generate anxiety and worry. We must protect what we have been given. Sometimes we must defend it. Luke 12:29-34. Do not make anxious efforts for food and drink. We don't need to strive because it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom. We don't need to worry about basics; God will take care of us.

If you work six days (or six years) with all your heart, you can count on God to take care of you and yours. So without fear leave your field untilled. The birds do not sow or harvest or collect into granaries and God takes care of them. The Gentiles who pay no attention to the Sabbath are not richer than you.

Jesus is not supporting sloth. He is talking about honoring God and doing business God's way and then trusting Him to take care of you. We don't need to hoard. We don't need to work 7 days a week to get ahead. We can follow Jubilee principles and be blessed. We can give to others without expecting a return (Luke 6:34, 35; Matt 5:42). We don't need excessive profits. We can free ourselves from anxiety and the bondage of worry and from the shackles of endless consumption.

Worry focuses on tomorrow and what if's. We are to focus on the task today and work diligently for the glory of God in whatever we are doing. Mt. 6:34. Check priorities, focus on the KOG and God's business first, share with others, and trust. Psalm 37.

3. The Blinder. Luke 16:19-23. We could call this parable, "Surprised by Hell." We have the rich man and Lazarus. We don't have details that the rich man gained his riches illegally or by swindling others. He's just rich and Lazarus, the only named character in the parables, is lying at the gate. Lazarus means "God helps." The rich man has dinners and big feasts. Guests did not use napkins back then, but wiped their sticky hands on chunks of bread to throw them under the table. The Greek word for beggar is related to the word for spit. The household guests tossed leftovers to Lazarus. Lazarus spoiled the spirit of the party, however.

Dogs didn't care. They symbolize the Gentile outcasts. The dogs had no favorites and licked the wounds of poor Lazarus, who was covered with sores. So the dogs show compassion. They used their saliva for healing the one who was as spit. The rich man ends up in hell and Lazarus sits at Abraham's right hand in a place of honor. The tables turn. The rich man begs for a drop of water.

This isn't a story about the poor waiting for their reward by and by. The ending of the story focuses on five rich brothers still alive. The rich man wants Abraham to let Lazarus rise from the dead and warn the brothers, but Abraham says that they have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.

The rich man's brothers have known about the Jubilee principles since childhood. They should have heard the Jubilee laws. But they will get no special privileges in regards to election. Their money will not save them. If they are blind, it is because they are not elect. If they do not hear, the same. Salvation doesn't come because someone is raised from the dead, by miraculous signs. Salvation is of grace and that by God who alone saves. The only ones who see and hear are those who have been chosen to do so, those to whom the Son chooses to reveal the Father.

4. The Boss. Wealth and consumerism can dominate and order our lives if we let them. In Luke 16:1-9, Jesus talks about an absentee landowner and a steward who manages the estate. The steward writes contracts on behalf of the landlord but includes a hidden interest charge, which was forbidden in the law. It's not clear who benefited from the hidden interest, the owner or the steward.

The Pharisees had concocted ways to charge hidden interest so as to be condoned in Jewish civil courts. Interest could be charged if the loan was not of "immediate necessity." So if someone had one drop of oil and wanted to borrow more oil, the loan was not of immediate necessity because the person still had one drop of oil. The rule was for commodity loans, but monetary loans were often translated into commodity values so that hidden interest could be charged. The interest was never written into the contract, however. Regardless, the intent was to sidestep the Law and Jubilee principles.

The steward gets caught, but then the steward calls in his master's debtors and reduces their debts. The land lord commends the steward for his swift action. The steward lost a lot. He didn't have the power to forgive the entire debt but could forgive the forbidden interest to make things right. The steward was morally a transgressor but legally okay according to the culture of the day. According to the law, the steward could have forced the debtors into slavery for default on the interest. But the interest wasn't the property of the master, according to OT law. Under oral law, if the steward forgave interest without the owner's authority, the owner had to accept the steward's decision. The owner had nothing to lose regardless. The owner would have appeared caring.

The story begins with masters who don't trust stewards, merchants who hate stewards, and stewards who cheat both master and merchants. In the end, merchants are happy with lowered debts, the master praises the steward for eliminating dishonest contracts, and the happy steward saves his job by doing the right thing.

Jesus ends with an upside-down saying: **“The sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.”** The Pharisees were supposedly the sons of light who had devised ways to skirt the law of God as lovers of money. The worldly steward acted righteously by canceling the interest that wasn't supposed to be charged in the first place. If the Pharisees could not be faithful in a little thing like loaning money, how could God trust them to handle the greater wealth of the KOG?

Jesus then says that a slave cannot serve two masters for the slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Luke 16:13) The Pharisees scoffed. But Jesus says that what is prized by human beings is an abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:15). The demands of two masters can collide. The law of God said not to charge interest to a fellow Jew. The Pharisees permitted it. The steward chose to obey God's law and so the scoundrel turns hero.

This is a matter of allegiance. Mammon is an Aramaic term which means wealth, money, property, or profit. Jesus sees mammon claiming divine status, as something competing directly with God for loyalty and service. Jesus doesn't grant deity status to knowledge, skill, appearance, occupation, nobility, or nationality. But He does to wealth because wealth wants to be boss and control us.

Jesus is not against money. He is against enslavement to money and obsession with money, material possessions, and consumerism. To whom will we devote our passion? We cannot freely serve God if we are entrapped by wealth and materialism. We cannot serve God and wealth simultaneously. We can use wealth to serve God's purposes. Mammon must bow and serve Jesus.

Jesus is not against profit, but rather against oppressing the poor and profiteering. It's like the gas shortage and price gouging. Jesus is against exploitation. Some things may be legal but not moral. In our country, the principles of Jesus do show up in our laws on profiteering and price gouging, illegal trading practices, fraud, etc. Mercy, love, and compassion will be yardsticks in the KOG.

##### 5. The Damning effect.

In Luke 12:13-21 a man runs up to Jesus and asks for legal advice. His brother won't share the family inheritance. The man wants Jesus to reprimand his stingy brother. Jesus refuses to mediate. Jesus starts to tell a story about barns after detecting greed and worry about getting a fair share of the family farm. In the story a farmer has it good, with extra. He plans a party but that night God calls him a fool and demands his soul. Luke 12:21. In the story the barn is really a warehouse for permanent storage. The man is hoarding rather than practicing the Jubilee by sharing the great surplus. This is not the righteous sabbatical storage of the sixth year's yield but rather selfish expansion at the expense of the poor. (Luke 12:19, 20). The fool in the Bible is one who says there is no God (Psalm 14:1). The farmer is living as though there is no God. When God calls someone a fool, He is damning the person.

In just four verses (16-19) the farmer makes 11 references to himself in Jesus' story. God doesn't sit down and talk about the man's motives; He snatches away his life. The farmer is not some monster, just securing his future and expanding his own interests.

Jesus warns to watch it. Luke 12:15. Watch out for greed, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions. The world says that financial success determines significance. Abundant life is going to have in it abundant possessions, according to the world's values. Advertising says that the goodies of this world will satisfy our soul. Greed may build bigger barns for selfish purposes, but a person could have their life required of them. Life is fragile; it needs to be handled with prayer and in seeking the true goods that count for eternal relationship with a holy God.

6. The Curse. In the Beatitudes Jesus awards the poor and chastises the comfortable. In our society we reward sports people regardless of their personal failings. We reward celebrities, those who entertain us. Those who entertain us are winners. They get our money and our votes. We give them power over us. But when Jesus is exalting the poor, to whom does He refer? Is being financially poor a quick door into heaven? No. The term poor has at least 3 meanings: (1) the materially poor, (economic) (2) the oppressed, as captives, slaves, the sick and destitute, the desperate, anyone who must depend on the mercy of the powerful, (social) (3) the humble in spirit—those who are poor toward God regardless of economic, social, and emotional status. These are the poor in spirit and theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt. 5:3). Matthew underscores inner spiritual poverty while Luke clearly has the materially poor in mind. Compare Luke 6:20-26 and Mt. 5:3ff.

To those who are poor both in attitude and circumstance, Jesus has good news. They have not been trashed by God or thrown out. God cares. The rich and proud may be indicted by God for refusing to practice Jubilee. The poor may receive God's welcome and watchful eye, but they don't get a free ticket to glory. The poor may have fewer entanglements and seem freer to abandon themselves to the KOG because they have little to give up. Material poverty in Jewish thinking was a sign that God was not blessing; but Jesus says they are blessed. God welcomes the poor. When Jesus welcomed nobodies into the kingdom and blessed the poor, it offended both the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

Nobody has the edge, however. Rich and poor alike must come in humility before God and both need a Savior, the Messiah. Poor people can be unthankful, proud, arrogant, and balking at God. Rich people can be unthankful, proud, arrogant, and balking at God. Both rich and poor can be greedy and covetous, dissatisfied and angry at God, "takers" and not "givers."

The kingdom goes to those who repent and believe in Jesus, those who see and enter the kingdom, and that doesn't happen without the Holy Spirit. And in the kingdom of God, both groups are to practice Jubilee, for in the kingdom all are rich, rich toward God. Both, in supreme loyalty and attachment to Jesus, are to live by grace through faith which works by love. Amen.

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Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:11-13 ESV

For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking  
but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17 ESV

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