

MAY DAYS

Pastoral Bible Study on:

“Foundational Discipleship Instructions”

May 1(TH), 8 (TH), 14 (W), 22 (TH), 29 (TH)

7:00 pm – 8:15 pm weekly

(in-person & online)

Instructor:

Rev. Dr. Leslie D. Braxton

Week 3

“Choosing Your Master” (God vs Mammon)

Texts:

Matthew 6:19-24,

Mark 10:17-28,

Mark 12:41-44

Lesson Overview

This section (6:19-7:12) corresponds to the third of 3 Pillars of Judaism, ***Deeds of Loving Kindness*** (e.g., practicing ethical behavior and compassion towards others). Parenthetically, the other two pillars of Judaism are ***Torah*** (e.g., God’s laws and teachings) and ***Service of God*** (e.g., engaging in divine service through prayer and worship). This section begins with trusting and serving God with one’s material possessions (6:19-34) and builds toward the “Golden Rule” (7:12).

Serving God or Mammon

(6:19-24)

(19) Do not store up for yourselves treasure on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

“Treasure in Heaven” was a common Jewish image for eschatological reward. Jesus (and Matthew) does not spell out how the disciples are to store up treasures in heaven. He leaves room for the disciple’s creative response in his or her situation.

(22) The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. (23) 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!

In contrast to the modern understanding, which regards the eye as a window that lets light into the body, the common understanding in the ancient world was that the eye was like a lamp (Prov 15:30; 2 Sam 12:11; Dan:10:6), an instrument that projects the inner light onto objects so they may be seen. Therefore, if the eye is unsound, confusion and darkness reign within the person. Of itself, the statement may have many meanings. In this context, Jesus relates the saying to the issue of the disciples' attitude toward money and property, declaring that if the eye is not clear on this matter, the whole of one's life is perverted.

(24) 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 (cf. Luke 16:13)

This statement assumes the existence of slavery (cf. Luke 16:13, gr. *doulos* = slave). By omitting the word slave, Matthew applies the statement directly to the disciples. **Love** and **hate** do not refer to emotions but represent the biblical idiom for "choose"/ "not choose" (see 5:43). The point is that undivided service can be given to one master only: if there is more than one, every choice means favoring one and rejection of the other, hence a split in the disciple's loyalty. Like the beatitudes (esp. 5:8) and verse 24 below, this statement is a call for the unity of the person.

Mammon is simply the Aramaic word for "property," including money, and in itself has no sinister connotations. However, Jesus highlights the temptation of placing worldly goods on par with God as an object of service, an idolatrous rival to the one God. It also highlights the conflict of priorities that arises when wealth is a primary focus, potentially leading to a disdain for God's teachings and ways. Jesus' presupposition in verse 24 is sharp and clear: that human life is not self-sufficient; that we find the meaning of our lives outside ourselves; that human life inescapably "serves" something that gives it meaning. The choice is not whether we shall serve, but what or whom we shall serve? That is the hard question that we are confronted with in this section. Who (or what) have we chosen to be our Master?

2 Case Studies on a Person's Relationship to God vs Mammon

The Rich Man

Mark 10:17-28 (cf. Luke 16:19-31)

The Poor Widow

Mark 12:41-44

Questions

1. How do these 2 figures cohere or contradict Matthew 16:19-24?
2. List ways in which you see yourself in either or both figures.