

“Mammon Lies, Friends Don’t: Why We Fight the Upside Down with Sacrificial Generosity”- Matt 13:18-23, 6:19-24

Series Slide

3rd-5th graders welcome.

Today is last Sunday in this series where we’ve been talking about the basic ways to “Do Church Good”.

We’ve been going through our 6 Pillars for Covenant Members at City Church. They represent the 6 actions that the members of City Church promise to do with and for each other. The Pillars aren’t EVERYTHING we do, but they are the fundamental actions- like Pillars, that support & undergird everything we do. Here they are again.

City Church Pillars

Cultivate, don’t consume, in the Worship Gathering.

Cultivate, don’t consume, in a Community Group.

Be Financially & Sacrificially Generous.

Share the Gospel & Make Disciples.

Practice Spiritual Disciplines.

Don’t quit when it gets difficult. That’s how you’ll grow.

Today- like I’m sure you’ve all been eagerly awaiting- we’re gonna talk about being Financially & Sacrificially Generous.

But I don’t want to come at this by talking about money- mainly. Instead, I want to talk about the evil spirit that uses money. So lets start with Stranger Things.

There’s a new Season of the Netflix show Stranger Things out...

...but I can't talk about it... I haven't even finished it.

But I do want to talk about an ancient concept- that comes bubbling up in all 4 seasons of the show. (and the Ghostbusters franchise as well- though I'll leave that alone)

First, let me not assume that you know or care anything about this show. That's fine- you don't have to- all we need to see is its basic pattern.

The show is about a group of teenagers who live in Hawkins, Indiana in the 1980s. One of the friends has reluctant supernatural powers- the rest- all of them are a bunch of particularly outcast teenagers.

The friends discover that their town is under the influence of darker spiritual powers. Referred to as the Upside-Down. Its like a dark & backwards version of their town. And there is a rift open between this dark version of Hawkins- and the Hawkins they live in day-to-day.

Over the course of 4 seasons- the teenagers in various ways- battle against the monsters- all that come from the Upside Down.

There are 3 groups of people in every season.

One group is comprised of the people who are unaware of the Upside Down, some of whom end up controlled by it or killed by it. But the point is...they are clueless to all the spiritual stuff happening right under their feet. Lets call these people- **the Unaware**. Some are complicit with the evil spiritual forces without knowing it- Like Billy...others become victims of the Upside Down before they even realize it exists. See Barb.

The second group are the people who are aware of the presence and power of the Upside Down- but they're trying to attain its power and use it for their own purposes. So they exploit people for their nefarious ends- to exploit the power of the Upside Down. This would be the Scientists in Hawkins or the Russians. Lets call these people- **the Exploiters**

Then there are the people who recognize the evil of the Upside Down...and come together to fight against it. Which is always this group of under-resourced teenagers. And even the adults that partner with them...are outsiders. Hopper is the Sherriff that's down & out. Joyce Byers is the single Mom barely scraping a living together. – lets call these people- **the Friends**.

So those are the 3 groups of humans. **The Friends, The Exploiters, and the Unaware**. And every season- all 3 of these groups come into contact with the Evil of the Upside Down.

Now- here's the pattern.

Every season- The Upside Down breaks into the world of the Unawares. Harming people.

The Exploiters try to get the power of the Upside Down- by harming people.

And the Friends, bound together by relationships based on truth & love- reminding one another that "Friends don't lie"- fight against the evil of the Upside Down- and ultimately defeat it through a single act of sacrifice that nobody sees- so the Unaware can be freed from the evil oppression of the monster.

They overcome evil by letting the harm come to them.

- 1) The Upside Down threatens the Unaware.
- 2) The Exploiters exploit the Unaware.
- 3) Friends save the Unaware through hidden Sacrifice.

So here's the thing- We're gonna talk about Money today. But really- we're gonna talk about this same pattern- as it relates to money- and more importantly- the evil spirit from the Upside Down that uses money as his tool. His name is Mammon.

Title Slide- **"Mammon Lies, Friends Don't: Why we Fight the Upside Down with Sacrificial Generosity"- Matt 13:18-23, 6:19-24**

And he is an absolute Mind Flayer.

So If you are unaware of this spiritual battle happening right under your feet...you won't be after today. You are either going to become a victim of Mammon- an exploiter chasing Mammon's power- ...or your gonna be a Friend that sacrifices to send this monster back to the hell it emerged from.

Again- Welcome 3rd to 5th graders!

Matthew 13:18-23

18 "So listen to the parable of the sower: 19 When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and doesn't understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path. 20 And the one sown on rocky ground — this is one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy. 21 But he has no root and is short-lived. When distress or persecution comes because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 Now the one sown among the thorns — this is one who hears the word, but the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 But the one sown on the good ground — this is one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields: some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown."

Matthew 6:19-24

19 "Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole

body will be full of darkness. So if the light within you is darkness, how deep is that darkness!

24 "No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Mammon.

Transition: Before we get to the fight against Mammon, let's talk about what Mammon is and the lies it tells you. (BTW- Andy Crouch's new book "The Life We're Looking For" was very helpful in organizing some of my thoughts today. I highly recommend it to you)

1) The spirit of Mammon wants to separate power from relationship- and abundance from dependence.

- The creatures that come from the Upside Down often disguise themselves. They are sneaky. They are only seen in short flashes...or they come in the form of ordinary human beings.
- If the citizens of Hawkins aren't paying attention- like the Unawares- the monsters sneak up on them- and eat them up.
- In other words- They deceive. They lie.
- This is the way of Mammon.

• Matt 6:24

- When Jesus says you can't serve God and Money- that word for money is actually "Mammon"
- If you read this in the original language- this really pops. Because its all Greek- until you get to that word for wealth- Mammon- which is Aramaic- likely the language Jesus spoke most often.
- So why isn't that word translated to Greek?
- Well, because Mammon doesn't just mean "money". Mammon refers to the anti-God spirit that uses money for evil.

- And likely- its reference was so universally recognizable- that Mammon was just the word used even in the Greek culture at the time.
- Jesus is particularly pointing out what the Unawares are so Unaware of...the spiritual nature of money.
- Jesus, on many occasions, would bring attention to the way Mammon would use money to work against the Kingdom of God.
- Here, clearly- he is juxtaposing the one true God and Mammon. Good vs. Evil.
- This- he says- is a spiritual battle- and you are going to have to pick a side. And as you are picking a side- know this- Mammon is going to try and trick you.
- And Mammon's trick is not going to be "Pick me over God".
- No.
- Mammon's lie will be- "You can serve two masters. You're not greedy. You can love God and stack up the cash. Nothing wrong with working hard and spending your money- or saving your money. Its Ok. If someone tries to get their hands on your money...they are the greedy ones!!!!"
- Lets take a closer look at this lie.
- **Matt 13:22**
- In the parable of the sower that we read earlier, notice the way Mammon attacks the Unawares.
- The word here- it says is the word about the Kingdom of God.
- Basically- when the Unaware becoming AWARE that there is more to life than the material...than what you can touch and see...and start to wake up to the reality that there is a Benevolent King- reigning over his Kingdom.

- That there is more to life than what you can see and touch...and eventually- that Jesus is that King...
- Jesus says- people will hear this Word about the Kingdom- and they will start to believe it. Investigate it. Be attracted to it. They will begin their journey back to knowing God...and being known by God.
- And then he says, one of the things that will throw them off this trail of following the King in his Kingdom- is the combination of the anxiety- or worries- of the present age...and the deceitfulness of wealth- that combination chokes out the word...and the person becomes unfruitful.
- Notice- the combination. Worries of the age. And the deceitfulness of wealth.

Back to 1)

- Lies are ineffective- without the right fearful conditions.
- Worry- anxiety- is right where lies love to take root.
- And, like Jesus says- this is happening at a spiritual level- with the intent purpose of the Spirit of Mammon- to throw you off the pursuit of the Kingdom of God.
- Mammon will exploit your anxiety- by selling you a lie- that money will cure your anxiety- as long as you give yourself completely to attaining it...holding on to it...or spending it on yourself.
- And Mammon's lies center around these two strategies.
- To separate Power from Relationship.
- And Abundance from Dependence.
- Andy Crouch tells a story in his book "The Life We're Looking For" about moving.
 - Newly married- poor.
 - Gets some friends together to help him move.

- It's a grueling- all day sweat-fest- filled with cursing as the sleep sofa presses against his face in the stairwell (PIVOT!)
 - But he knew every person by name- and made memories with all of them. His experience grew him- and grew their relationship.
- Years later- with a family, short on time, and not really wanted to go through the difficulty of moving- they used money to hire movers. Their stuff- almost magically, disappeared from their old house- and was transported across the country to a new house.
 - They didn't know a single movers' name- and it brought no opportunity for deepening relationship.
 - Now I'm not saying its evil to hire movers. In fact- for some of us- it might actually save our Christian witness. If you ever really want to hear a Xian cuss- just help them move.
 - The point is- Mammon- even in small ways- tempts us with this power to make relationships all transactional. To see people as "useful" rather than love them.
 - To evaluate "friendships" based on their economy.
 - This is a part of Mammon's lie. Avoid the hard of relationships. Use money to cushion your life.
 - Use the power of money to serve yourself- and get realtionships that help you use money to serve yourself.
 - Look for the job that pays the most- and sepearates you from your family- and causes you to have no margin for friends or church family.
 - After all- you CAN serve God and Mammon.

- Mammon wants your relationships to be transactional- not loving. Mammon wants you to use its POWER for yourself- and exploit the unawares.
- Anxious- go shopping- don't seek wise counsel!
- Anxious about the future- Don't give your money away- HOLD ONTO IT! It can keep you safe. Don't worry. God want mind. After all- its your money! Why shouldn't pad your bank account...you know- in case something bad happens.
- Anxious about not keeping up with the Jones!- You show the Jones' that you can keep up. And you won't do that by reading Scripture or hanging out with that socially down & out person.
- NO! SPEND! GET! ACCUMLATE! Then find influential friends and take pictures with all your stuff and put it on Instagram so the Jones' see that you won't be left behind!
- Flex your financial muscles. Use the power of Money to rescue you from your fear of Missing Out...or your fear of not being influential...or not having respect. ...and you can even still go to church!
- This is the lie of Mammon- separating Power from relationship.
- Additionally, Mammon separates Abundance from dependence.
- The Unawares fall victim to this in America so often.
- We live life in a buffered state- that is itself a bit of a lie.
- By that I mean, you can walk into a grocery store, stop by one right after church today- and pretty much find anything you want to eat.
- Or, like many of us will do- you can swing into a fast-cas restaurant and have a burrito or a burger ready to eat in a matter of seconds.
- And we hardly even think about all the people it took to get that burrito on our plate- or those ingredients in our grocery store.

- To us- we have earned our money- and our abundance is a right. We don't think we depend on anyone.
- This is something that we are kind-of waking up to right now.
- Covid- and the war in Ukraine- have crippled many supply chains- to the point we are forced to make the connection that you can have all the money you want- but if there is no toilet paper, or baby formula, or beef, or cheap gas available- because those people are not there to produce it, and ship it- then you are powerless to change it.
- Additionally- we forget that our ability to even earn money- comes from God. It is God's idea that we cultivate- and work hard to share what we have. God gave you the body and the mind you have- so anything you think you do of your own accord- its all a gift. You are dependent!
- But Mammon- seeking to devalue the image of God in the unaware...just wants you to think that as long as you have money- you should be able to have whatever you want whenever you want it.
- And its true- The more money we have- the more we lose the sense of dependence on other people.
- And the more God-like we feel. Want to control a situation? Just threaten to take your money away.

Listen, Mammon likes to start work on the Unaware. You just sort of live like money is this neutral thing- with no spiritual power behind it. Before you know it- you are transformed into an Exploiter. Using people, instead of loving people- because the deceitfulness of Mammon has you believing that Power can be separated from relationships- and Abundance requires no dependence.

Lets let the very BLUNT brother of Jesus- James- take us from the worst of the Upside Down- into the HOW to live in the Kingdom of God and resist Mammon's lies.

James 5:1-8

Come now, you rich people, weep and wail over the miseries that are coming on you.

2 Your wealth has rotted and your clothes are moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have stored up treasure in the last days. 4 Look! The pay that you withheld from the workers who mowed your fields cries out, and the outcry of the harvesters has reached the ears of the Lord of Armies. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and have indulged yourselves. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned, you have murdered the righteous, who does not resist you.

7 Therefore, brothers and sisters, be patient until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth and is patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, because the Lord's coming is near.

Transition: Lets see how Jesus calls us to operate with money

2) The Spirit of God calls us to Sacrificial Generosity that uses money to serve relationships- and finds abundance through dependence.

- In juxtaposition to the Unaware, the Exploiters, and the evil of the Upside Down- stand the friends.
- The Friends in Stranger Things live by the motto- "Friends Don't Lie".

- And- as painful as it is- one of the friends- ends up sacrificing their life or well-being- not only the sake of the others- but for the whole town of Unawares in Hawkins. In other words, Friends that live in the truth and for the truth- give themselves away- they are generous- and in doing so- they save many.
- In Luke's gospel- when he tells this account of Jesus saying you can't serve God and Mammon- he tells this sort of confusing parable...about a really evil guy- who realizes that his money can't save him- instead that he needs friends- that relationships, love and dependence on others, is at the center of life. I've preached on it more than once if you want to go back on the podcast and take a listen...I don't have time to go through the whole thing today.
- At the end of that story Jesus says this.
 - **Luke 16:9**
 - **And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of worldly wealth so that when it fails, they may welcome you into eternal dwellings.**
- Want to guess what word is translated "worldly Wealth"?
- That's right. Its Mammon.
- Jesus says- Mammon will lie to you, and tempt you to use money to extract power from relationships. And it will tempt you to separate abundance from Dependence.
- But in this parable- which ends with a guy completely dependent on others and giving away money he cant keep to gain friends that he can...
- Well- it's showing us that the Spirit of God will not only defeat Mammon- but will use mammon to defeat itself.
- Its like the cross of Jesus. Jesus defeats death by dying.
- He forgives sin- by becoming sin for us.

- Notice- his aim is not to GET RID OF MONEY!!!
- LIVE OFF THE LAND!!!
- Instead- its take the temporary money you have- and all its lies and false promises- and use it to make friends for eternity. Give it away generously.
- Take a look at the passage we read in Matt 6
- **Matt 6:25**
- Jesus tells this people who are anxious and caught up about their own lives- that if they run out of money- they want be cared for- and he calls them to notice the spiritual.
- Look- he's waking up the unaware. He says- "Turn you attention to the fact that there is MORE to life than the material."
- He's saying- wake up and realize the cosmic and spiritual nature of what is going on with Money. Behind money is Mammon- an evil spirit...but- behind God's dependent creation- is a God that wants you to DEPEND on him for abundance.
- That's when he says "consider the birds and the flowers" God takes care of them. Be dependent on him!!!!

- **Matt 6:32-33**

- And then watch the call to seem the spiritual again.
- He says- the Gentiles- or the Unawares- they are the ones that worry. Instead- know that God is relational. He is benevolent Father- who will provide for his children. Life is about relationship with God. Being dependent on him.
- And he calls this- Seeking the Kingdom of God.
- Seek God's righteousness- Seek his justice. His wholeness. No matter what it costs. Keep your eyes on the UNSEEN- so that you don't become UNAWARE of the deception of Mammon- or that you

aren't lured away to its power- to seek money as the cure to your anxiety.

- Now- let me show you a couple of passages that really put this RIGHT SIDE UP Kingdom on display.
- One is in a often overlooked, very short letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to his friend Philemon.
- And look at the power of the names here. There is some INCREDIBLE WORDPLAY happening.
- First of all- Philemon means "Loving".
- And "Onesimus" means useful.
- Onesimus is Philemon's slave. His servant. I don't have time to go into the intricacies of first century near eastern slavery- but know 2 things about it. #1- its not the 18th century Chattel slavery we have come to know and hate that was solely based on a construct and false belief about RACE and human worth. Which- by the way- is probably one of the greatest examples of the Spirit of Mammon run wild on the earth. This is not that- but 2ndly-like 18th century chattel slavery- it does have Mammon at its heart. Because it valued the usefulness of persons over a relationship of love.
- So Onesimus- the useful one- runs away from the Ironically named Philemon- and he meets Paul. And decides to follow Jesus- as Paul shares the gospel and makes him a disciple- and so Paul sends a letter back to Philemon- through Onesimus.
- Wow. I want you to just understand the absolutely SACRIFICE and upside down nature of this truly rightside up act.
- WOW. Onesimus- of his own will- because he has met the King- Jesus Christ- goes back to the man who saw him only as useful- putting himself in danger- in order to compel him to live for the same Jesus.

- THAT is generous. That is sacrifice. That is Holy Spirit- courage.
- Now lets take a look at the letter.

- **Philemon 1:8-16**

- **8 For this reason, although I have great boldness in Christ to command you to do what is right, 9 I appeal to you, instead, on the basis of love. I, Paul, as an elderly man and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus, 10 appeal to you for my son, Onesimus. I became his father while I was in chains. 11 Once he was useless to you, but now he is useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him back to you – I am sending my very own heart. 13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that in my imprisonment for the gospel he might serve me in your place. 14 But I didn't want to do anything without your consent, so that your good deed might not be out of obligation, but of your own free will. 15 For perhaps this is why he was separated from you for a brief time, so that you might get him back permanently, 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave – as a dearly loved brother. He is especially so to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.**

- Look at the influence of Mammon- Cave to the Spirit of God and the influence of Love.
- Paul is calling the spirit of Mammon to do now- what it will for eternity- BOW to God- and confess Jesus as Lord.
- Through sacrifice- the down and out friends use love and truth-telling- to rescue- even their exploiters.
- That is sacrifice.
- That is LOVING your enemies. (even if their name translates "Loving")
- That is SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

- Remember where all our pillars came from?
- Joel preached this at the very first of this series.

- **Acts 2:43-47**

- **43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. 44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.**

- Look at the abundance- They distributed proceeds as all has need. They held all things in common- look at the trust- instead of the get your hands off my money.
- They became dependent on one another- and out of it flowed abundance for their community.
- Remember- that our pillars are about Covenant. Made and kept promises.

Back to Pillars Slide

- I know it can feel like a calling to financial & sacrificial generosity is disconnected from the rest of these pillars. But they are all about keeping promises, Keeping Covenant instead of Consuming.
- And if you give yourself over to
- A way to wake up to the spiritual reality. To seek first the Kingdom of God- and its RIGHT SIDE UPNESS.

- The thing with Hawkins- is the Friends will respect and fight against the Upside Down...they will recognize THAT spiritual power...but they operate almost entirely like there is not a Right Side Up Kingdom of God.
- They act as if its HUMANS against Demons.
- Yet, Christ calls us to SEEK THE KINGDOM OF GOD- to recognize that there is a God...and God became human- to make all things new.
- When he teaches us to pray- he teaches us to pray- On Earth- as it is in heaven. IN Hawkins, as it is in heaven. IN MURFREESBORO- as it is in heaven.
- Church- we are the friends- when we make these covenant promises to cultivate, instead of consume-
- If

Lords Supper