

A lot of people these days seem to be worried about getting older. I can't quite see it when you consider the alternative. A page in the recent issue of Reader's Digest says “You know you're getting older when... 1) You're more worried about what time the party ends than when it starts, 2) You can't tell the difference between the name of current [rock] bands and typos, 3) Most of the names in your black book have MD after them.” There is so much to worry about these days, I can't for the life of me see why anyone would worry about getting older. Worry, however, should not be taken lightly because worry can easily enslave us. It can become our life's master. And as Jesus said, “*No one can serve two masters.*”

Perhaps you have seen the license plates that show the phrase *A House Divided* accompanied by the logos of two rival college football teams. I saw a decal on an SUV window a couple of weeks ago that had WVU on one side and Pitt on the other. A house divided. This phrase often reminds us of Abraham Lincoln's famous speech in 1858. On June 16, 1858, at the Illinois Republican convention in Springfield, Abraham Lincoln kicked off his bid for the U.S. Senate with a speech that would come to be known as the “House Divided” speech. What he was referring to is the issue of slavery as it related to a divided nation. What many people don't know is that the line was not original with Lincoln but rather Lincoln was quoting Jesus. Jesus said, “*If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand*” (Mark 3:24-25 NRSV). Jesus is telling us, in other words, that competing allegiances in a kingdom, a house, or a heart, will lead to destruction. Division leads to war in which there is either constant strife or one side eventually wins out.

Last Sunday we were challenged to consider where we invest our hearts. If we examine where we spend our time, our money, and our energy, we will see where our hearts are invested. And to remind you once again, Jesus emphasizes that our hearts follow our treasure, not the other way around. One easy way to check on our investment is to look at our spending habits or check out our Google calendar. By doing so, most of us would find that our hearts are indeed divided. We have said yes to too many commitments, signed too many contracts, and swiped too many credit cards. Now we must work to pay for a lot of stuff that can never make us happy.

Jesus says in Matthew 6 that no one can serve two masters. A person trying to do so will inevitably like one master and hate the other; be devoted to one master and despise the other. Jesus says that we can't serve both God and wealth. Nevertheless, we can most certainly serve God *with* our wealth. Jesus made that clear on many occasions. But as we examine our lives, we may discover that we have far more than two masters competing for hearts!

When we are serving two, three, or ten masters and our hearts are divided among them, we are not living as God intends us to. I think this may explain why we resent or even hate the things that pull us away from our intended treasure. We end up hating our job, or our boss, because they have become an unintended master of our lives.

Does this mean we can't make money? Of course not! Does this mean we can't have a healthy relationship with money? No! It does mean that we can't serve God *and* money. They can't both be our master. We can't be servants of Jesus and servants of money; we must choose. And if we choose to make

Jesus Lord and Master of our lives, our money will serve him, just as we serve him with our time and talents and energy.

God doesn't want our shared allegiance. In the Old Testament that was called idolatry. God doesn't want a little piece of our life. God wants to be everything in our lives. If we make Jesus Lord and Master, the other allegiances will find their proper place. We will still have to work and be committed to other people. We will still have to live as responsible citizens and family members and neighbors, but we will not have a heart or house, or life, that's divided. We will stand on ground that is firm and faithful.

Mike Slaughter says "I believe that when we become a Christian, there is one new birth but many conversions. I became a new person in Jesus in 1969, but I wasn't converted in my wallet until 1976." I was in seminary at the time. About two weeks before graduation, one of my professors pulled me aside. He said, "Mike, if you are not tithing, please do not go into ministry. Don't pollute the church. Go teach school or something. We don't need any more people in the church who preach, 'Do what I say, not what I do.'"

That simple conversation hit me very hard. I was converted. I realized that loving God is not about saying the right words, accepting an abstract ideal, or claiming an emotion. Loving God is an intentional commitment to self-sacrifice for the well-being of others. That is why God's word tells us, "*You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous in every way*" (2 Corinthians 9:11).

There's an old story about a conversation between a chicken and a pig. The chicken says, "Let's do breakfast." The pig replies, "That's easy for you to say. You just make a donation. For me, it's a total sacrifice." If we are to be followers of Jesus, then we are the pig, not the chicken. We have to move from small donations to total sacrifice, from consuming God's good gifts to investing in treasure in heaven.

I preached a sermon series based on Paul's letter to the church at Rome this past summer. When we came to the opening verses of Romans 12 I shared a story about how experiments aboard the space shuttle *Columbia*, led scientists to discover that there are twenty-six lakes beneath the Sahara desert. It's heartrending to think that people are starving and dying of thirst because these hidden resources have not yet been tapped. In a similar way, there are a number of spiritual resources that lie untapped in our church and in our individual lives because we've simply not gone deep enough. We keep things too superficial and lose some of the most valuable resources that God has given to us. I fear that we are often missing out on what the Christian life is all about. We are settling for something far less than what God intended.

But if we first drill down we can move on. In Romans 12 Paul challenges us to make an offering to God that is greater and more costly than anything we may throw in the offering plate, or any time that we may volunteer in the ministry of the church. God wants an indication that we are willing to give ourselves. Romans 12:1 in Eugene Peterson's *Message* version reads: "*So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life - your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life - and place it before God as an offering.*"

Placing our lives as an offering before God incorporates how we spend our time and energy and money. So how does money affect us? Money is a subject with which we all struggle. For some it is a lack of

money. For some it is the desire for money. For some it is the wrong use of money. For some it is poor investment of money. A man named Stumpy illustrates how money affects people. Stumpy and his wife Martha went to the state fair every year and every year when Stumpy saw the antique bi-plane he would say, “Martha, I’d like to ride in that airplane.” Martha always replied, “I know Stumpy, but that airplane ride costs ten dollars, and ten dollars is ten dollars.”

One year Stumpy and Martha went to the fair and Stumpy said, “Martha, I’m 81 years old. If I don’t ride that airplane I might never get another chance.” Martha replied, “Stumpy, that airplane ride cost ten dollars, and ten dollars is ten dollars.” The pilot overheard them and said, “Folks, I’ll make you a deal. I’ll take you both up for a ride. If you can stay quiet for the entire ride and not say one word, I won’t charge you: but if you say one word, it’s ten dollars.”

Stumpy and Martha agreed and up they went. The pilot did all kinds of twists and turns, rolls and dives, but not a word was heard. He did all his tricks a second time, but still not a word. When they landed, the pilot turned to Stumpy and said, “By golly, I did everything I could think of to get you to yell out, but you didn’t.” Stumpy replied, “Well, I was gonna say something when Martha fell out, but ten dollars is ten dollars.” (Taken from Great Stories, Vol. 6/Issue 24, p. 8)

Verse 24 summarizes what Jesus taught on the subject of money. *“You cannot serve both God and money.”* (NLT) In the previous verses Jesus had discussed earthly treasures. From that he launched into a discussion about worry and Jesus uses money as the introduction to his teaching about worry. Why? Because money is often the main concern of our worries, making worries about money the real master of our lives.

Several years ago actor Sylvester Stallone was asked what effect money had on his life. Stallone said: “Money does not bring peace of mind. Actually it brings more problems. Everything is magnified one hundred thousand times. That’s not to complain. But once you make a fortune, you’d think it would be all green lights and blue skies. But that’s not true. As a matter of fact it brings out some of the most vile characteristics that you can imagine.” (Great Stories, Vol. 5/Issue 17, p. 9)

Money has a powerful effect on people. Sometimes we have blind spots when it comes to money. In one of the Dennis the Menace cartoon strips Dennis catches his friend Joey trying to get a paper out of the machine without paying for it. He said, “Wait, Joey. First you have to put in the money... and then you can get all the papers you want.” That’s not exactly how it works Dennis. Sylvester Stallone and Dennis the Menace illustrate the powerful force exerted by money. It can create enormous problems for us.

Jesus says in Matthew 6: *“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”*

Having one Master is the way to master money problems. Let us stand and affirm Jesus as Lord and Master of our lives, using the words of the Scots Confession...