

“NO ONE CAN SERVE TWO MASTERS”
Jeremiah 8:18-9:1, I Timothy 2:1-7, Luke 16:1-15
September 21 & 22, 2019

On June 4, 2001, 12-year-old Little League pitcher Robert Knight pitched the game of his life. As batter after batter came to the plate for the opposing team in suburban Detroit, each player did his best to make his parents proud. Each tried, and failed, again and again, to hit a pitch off the 5-foot-3-inch, 100-pound Robert Knight.

Knight threw a perfect game--no, the PERFECT game. All 18 batters he faced in the six-inning game struck out! The final batter to face Knight had worked the count to 3 and 0, but Knight came back to strike him out as well.

"I could tell the other team didn't really want to come up to bat anymore after a while," said Mr. Perfect.

As the last strike was called, everyone from Knight's team ran out and celebrated with him. Parents clapped and yelled, but not Knight's parents. They were not at the game.

It's not that they didn't care. Robert's dad had driven his other son to another game, and his mom was at a softball game of her own down the street. When Mrs. Knight did arrive to pick up her son, Robert's coach told her, "Oh, this wasn't the game for you to miss."

Don't you hate it when you are so busy that you miss something really good?¹

The reason I share this story with you today is that it demonstrates the value of making good choices in our lives so that we don't miss important things. The choices we make influence our lives and determine what we might gain and what we might lose in the process of making those decisions. And many times, we don't know what we miss until after we've missed it and it's too late.

That's the condition we see in our Scripture lessons today, too. Our Old Testament lesson of Jeremiah 8 lifts up the major decision we have to make in our lives – the CHOICE between two options; to follow the Lord God and all of His ways, or to follow our own desires driven by the ways of

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 23-24)

this world. Over the last few weeks I've indicated this choice we need to make for ourselves, and today I want to put it to you in a little different way. We cannot serve two masters. We have to choose who will be guiding our lives.

We see this dilemma in the early verses of Jeremiah 8. Listen to verses 4-8. *"The Lord told me to say to His people, 'When someone falls down, doesn't he get back up? If someone misses the road, doesn't he turn back? Why then, My people, do you turn away from Me without ever turning back? You cling to your idols and refuse to return to Me. I listened carefully, but you did not speak the truth. Not one of you has been sorry for his wickedness; not one of you has asked, "What have I done wrong?" Everyone keeps on going his own way, like a horse rushing into battle. Even storks know when it is time to return; doves, swallows, and thrushes know when it is time to migrate. But, My people, you do not know the laws by which I rule you. How can you say that you are wise and that you know My laws? Look, the laws have been changed by dishonest scribes.'"* Do you see it? A choice to either follow the Lord God, or to follow our own ways. Each one of us is faced with this choice. Let's look at each option carefully so that we know what is really at stake.

The WAYS of the world are laid out in verses 10-12 of Jeremiah 8. *"...Everyone, great and small, tries to make money dishonestly. Even prophets and priests cheat the people. They act as if my people's wounds were only scratches. 'All is well,' they say, when all is not well. My people, were you ashamed because you did these disgusting things? No, you were not ashamed at all; you don't even know how to blush!..."* And so it goes to today, where everything is about making money, making others look bad while trying to make ourselves look good, making the wrong seem right and the right wrong, and lifting up indecency as if it was the best thing in the world, wildly attractive with no consequences.

The ways of the world call us to follow the idols we have made of materialism, pleasure, entertainment and convenience. We even make food our idol. We spend more time watching TV than we do reading the Bible or praying. We spend more on cars than we give to the church. We are more

enamored with our favorite sports team or music group than we are about knowing and sharing God's love. Our culture is so congested with idols that we have put God on the top shelf of our homes, out of the way and safely obscure, so that we aren't guilted into feeling bad about living without God's influences in our lives. But God asks us, as He did to those in Jerusalem, "*Why have you made me angry by worshiping your idols and by bowing down to your useless foreign gods?*" (Jer. 8:19). The ways of the world cast God out and brings everything else in.

And the ways of the world involve us following our own wisdom rather than using God's Word as the ultimate source of wisdom. We are eager to catch the latest news of what's going on in our world, but we can't settle down to see what God has to say about it. We trust in the wisdom of bishops and pastors when we neglect discovering God's truth in the Scriptures for ourselves. We rely upon the wisdom of politicians and governors and judges rather than seeking answers from the Bible. They have no problem changing the laws to fit their desires and accommodating all of the latest crazes. And we find Jeremiah saying, "*I wish I had a place to stay in the desert where I could get away from my people. They are all unfaithful, a mob of traitors. They are always ready to tell lies; dishonesty instead of truth rules the land. The Lord says, 'My people do one evil thing after another and do not acknowledge Me as their God.'*" (Jer. 9:2-3). And then we wonder why we're in the mess that's all around us!

But the ways of GOD are not like this. They are completely different. Psalm 119:1-3 tells us, "*Happy are those whose lives are faultless, who live according to the law of the Lord. Happy are those who follow His commands, who obey Him with all their heart. They never do wrong; they walk in the Lord's ways.*" These are the ones who put aside their own ways and let God have His way in and through them. These are the ones who diligently seek after following God's ways so that they are protected, provided for, and blessed by God.

Following the ways of God means following His WORD in our lives, using it as the guidance and direction for every decision and action we make. Allowing God's Word in the Bible to influence us and inspire us to continue to follow God's ways allows us to see that His ways are far better than our

ways, His wisdom greater than our own wisdom. When we allow God's Word to impact us, we are encouraged and challenged to grow deeper in our relationship with Him so that we strive to please Him in all we do. The psalmist says it best; Lord, *"How can a young man keep his life pure? By obeying Your commands. With all my heart I try to serve You; keep me from disobeying Your commandments. I keep your law in my heart, so that I will not sin against You"* (Psalm 119:9-11). It brings God such delight as we strive to let Him guide us with His authority and control so that we keep His ways.

The ways of God invite us to become His **SERVANTS**, diligently seeking to follow Him. Psalm 119:12-16 gives us great guidance in this, *"I praise you, O Lord; teach me Your ways. I will repeat aloud all the laws You have given. I delight in following Your commands more than in having great wealth. I study Your instructions; I examine Your teachings. I take pleasure in Your laws; Your commands I will not forget."* These are the words of a servant, one who eagerly seeks to let the Lord God's ways rule in their heart and mind and soul so that they might use all of their strength to serve Him in all His ways.

The ways of the world bring death, but the ways of the Lord God bring life. The ways of the world are selfish, controlling, and uncaring while the ways of the Lord God are self-giving, obedient, and loving. The ways of the world focus our attention on us alone, while the ways of God focus us on God in order to follow Him. The ways of the world are contrary to the ways of God, so a choice needs to be made as to which we will allow to rule in our hearts.

The Apostle Paul calls all of us to **CHOOSE LIFE!** He calls us to give up on the ways of this world and to seek the Lord for all things. In his words to Timothy, he calls for us to become aware of this huge difference in the ways of the world and the ways of God. He invites us to give ourselves over to the Lord God rather than to seek our own way in the world.

In I Timothy 2:1 we hear Paul *"...urge that petitions, prayers, requests, and thanksgivings be offered to God for all people..."* In essence, he is calling us to offer **OURSELVES** to God, even as we look beyond ourselves to see the needs of others. Everything in our life is to be offered to God; our

prayers for others, out petitions for ourselves, any requests we have for Him to work in us and any thanksgiving for what He has done. As we choose life, we turn to the Lord our God for His wisdom, His influence, His inspiration, His encouragement, His challenges, His Way! Choosing life means we humble ourselves before the Lord and give Him 100% of ourselves so that He might use us and lead us.

And this is so that we may live with all REVERENCE toward God. Paul says in I Timothy 2:2-4, “...that we may live a quiet and peaceful life with all reverence toward God and with proper conduct. This is good and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth.” In the midst of this chaotic world, we crave quiet and peaceful lives. But that only comes as we submit ourselves to the One who can make it happen. When we have reverence toward God, we make Him first in our lives, allowing us to feel His presence with us, even in the most difficult times. Reverence toward God means that we hold Him as the most important one in our life, more than husband or wife, more than parents or brothers and sisters, more than children or grandchildren. As we revere God, we honor His Word, trust His commands, and delight in His perspective on our lives. We seek to find His thoughts, His love, and His desire over anything else. To reverence God is to make Him Lord of our life; the One who calls all the shots, the One who gives all the duties, the One who provides all support and assistance.

Yet there is only ONE who can bring God and mankind together. There is only One who can bridge the chasm between us and God because of our sin. That One is Jesus Christ, God’s own Son, the One who died to pay the price for our sins, the One who brings eternal life to all who will believe in Him. Paul says it like this, “*For there is one God, and there is one who brings God and mankind together, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself to redeem all mankind. That was the proof at the right time that God wants everyone to be saved...*” (I Tim. 2:5-6). While the world offers many self-help options for us to deal with the problems of our lives, there are none that work. We can’t fix ourselves in order to find life. Life abundant here in this life and eternal life beyond this life, only come through Jesus, who is the perfecter of our faith, and the inspiration of our souls. He is the One that gives

life to all who turn to Him and follow Him and obey Him. Jesus is the only way that we can find real life, here in this life and beyond this life.

So we have this MESSAGE of faith and truth. The question is, “what are we going to do with it?” We have the greatest encouragement, the greatest hope, the greatest avenue of love, and the only way to find forgiveness, mercy and grace. But it’s not for ourselves to keep hidden in us. It’s not just for us! It is for us to take to those around us, even to the nations, so that they, too, might find and share in the goodness of the Lord. Paul experienced this in his life and he tells Timothy (I Tim. 2:17), “...*that is why I was sent as an apostle and teacher of the Gentiles, to proclaim the message of faith and truth...*” There are so many in our world who desperately need to hear this message, but who will take it to them? Don’t rely upon only the clergy to do it. You take the good news of Jesus to those around you. You all are ministers of the Gospel, the Good News, as servants of Jesus. Don’t wait for someone else to do your job as a witness of the love of Jesus to the world. Start living it. But it demands a choice, doesn’t it?

This leads us to the Gospel lesson of Luke 16:1-15. With the demand for us to make good choices, Jesus gives His disciples (and us) a very interesting parable (a story with a meaning). A manager of a rich man’s company is accused of misappropriation of funds. The owner of the company calls him in to account for his actions, and lets him know he is DONE as the manager. There doesn’t seem to be any argument from the manager about the accusation, but there is quick action on his part in order to have income for him and his family. He uses his position to make friends with the boss’s debtors so that when his job comes to an end, he will be able to find employment with others by reducing the debt of those who own the boss money, for his own benefit. He is very crafty using the boss’s resources to make a life for himself.

The important part about this parable is that an ACCOUNTING comes to each one of us as to what we have done in our life, and what decisions we have made. Just like this “shrewd manager,” each of us will be called before the Lord God to account for the things we have done in our life. The choices

we make will be judged by God to be found if they were faithful to His ways, or disobedient to His commands.

You see, our life is in the **BALANCE** to be measured by the Lord God. How have we used the resources of the Master? Were they used for our own selfish gain, or for the benefit of others? How have we used our time given to us? Have we frittered it away little by little in meaningless activity, or have we used our time wisely for the Lord's purposes? Have we wasted the gifts and skills and talents given to us by God, or have we used them to the fullest to touch the lives of others in a significant way for the glory of God? Have we sat on our hands out of fear and shame, or have we reached out to touch the life of another person who was in desperate need? Have we held back the encouraging words that another needs to hear, but given criticism instead? Have we failed to keep our promises? Have we said too much at another person's expense, rather than keeping quiet and just listening? Have we shared stories about others in a manner of trying to make ourselves look better?

These, and many more, are all choices we make that will be held in the balance as we stand before the Lord God on our own day of reckoning. Will we be found **FAITHFUL** even in the little things? How will it look for us when we are called to account for the decisions and choices we have made?

You see the choices we make with the little things will determine what we do with the bigger things. If we lie and cheat and misuse the little things of our life, how will we be trusted with larger things? If we mismanage and exploit the things belonging to someone else, how will we be trusted for things of our own? And if we cannot deal appropriately with the things of this life, how will God entrust us with more in the life to come? It all comes down to choices – will we serve God, or serve the world?

But then Jesus gives this important lesson for us in Luke 16:13, one that we need to consider carefully. *“No servant can be the slave of two masters; he will hate one and love the other; he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”* Here it is in a nutshell – we have to make a choice as to whom we will have as the most important in our life.

Jesus tells us to **SERVE** only ONE God! And He is not encouraging us to become servants of the world so that we can feed our own desires and fancies. Jesus calls us to serve the Lord God, and Him alone! For if we try to serve both God and the world, we will end up being very miserable people because there is no way we can serve both at the same time. They are mutually exclusive. We have got to choose which we will become servants to.

You see, **LOYALTY** matters. I cannot safely cheer on both the Green Bay Packers and the Chicago Bears. People in the stands look at me like I'm from another planet. They can deal with me if I cheer for the Bears, but if I try to do both, it's confusing – and dangerous in some places. And they will challenge me to pick a team. Choose which side you're on! It can't be both.

The same goes with us trying to follow the ways of God AND the ways of the world at the same time. But they just don't work together because they are mutually exclusive of each other. So I have to make a choice, each day, each minute of that day, every second of that minute, who I am going to be allowing to be lord of my life. Who will I let guide my life? We can't play the game of trying to please both – it has to be one or the other, so we must pick a side. No one can serve two masters!

The important thing to remember is God **KNOWS** your heart! He knows when we're just playing the game of split loyalty. He's not fooled by our being a chameleon trying to fit into both sides. He knows the desires of our heart, the motives behind our words and our actions, and the intentions behind our practices. We can't hide from God, so He calls us to choose one side or the other and then to live your life wholeheartedly in that camp. Only then can He do something with us. But realize that God has already done something for us, to bring us back to Him – Jesus lived and died and rose again for our sakes so that we might find our way back to Him, and choose Him to be our Savior.

The greatest question for us, however, is this; **“WHICH WAY will you choose?”** I'll give you the same words as Joshua did to the people of Israel in Joshua 24:14-15; *“Now then...honor the Lord and serve Him sincerely and faithfully. Get rid of the gods which your ancestors used to worship in Mesopotamia and in Egypt, and serve only the Lord. If you are not willing to serve Him, decide today whom you will serve, the gods your ancestors worshiped in Mesopotamia or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are now living. As for my family and me, we will serve the Lord.”* May you choose to follow the Lord, too, all the days of your life, in Jesus' Name. AMEN.