

Pastor Jim Lloyd

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Title: Which Is Your Master?

Text: Matthew 6:19-34

Being that today is Super Bowl Sunday, I toyed with the idea of entitling the message – “Who’s the Quarterback?” I have an unusually strong suspicion that many people will watch football today. I don’t profess to be a football expert. I’ve never been a referee and that’s likely a good thing for anyone who has played or watched football. But I have made a few observations. If you’ve ever watched football, you’ve probably noticed that between many a play there is quite a bit of activity going on between the sidelines and the playing field – some players RUNNING ON, other players RUNNING OFF. They’re making SUBSTITUTIONS. Most teams don’t rely on just ONE running back, or ONE wide-receiver or ONE linebacker; They have two or three in the line-up and they switch them in and out during the whole of the game. BUT there’s one substitution that teams ALMOST NEVER make. In fact, they typically don’t take this player out unless they just absolutely have to, and which player would that be? I’m talking about the QUARTERBACK. It’s not unusual to win a game with two or three different running backs or wide receivers, but to be most effective on offense, you need ONE – and ONLY one – quarterback at the helm. There have been teams that have tried to develop a two quarterback system. Even the great Tom Landry tried it (in the 70’s) with Roger Staubach and Craig Morton. It never seemed to work. Other teams have tried it. I don’t think it has ever consistently worked. That is because the QUARTERBACK is the TEAM LEADER on the field, and the team needs only ONE leader. The same could be said for HEAD coaches. There are a variety of coaches on any NFL team. Including strength & conditioning coaches, the TYPICAL NFL team averages 15 assistant coaches, BUT there is only ONE HEAD coach. Can you imagine how chaotic it would be to have two different HEAD coaches? You’d have more than one game plan. You’d likely have CONFLICTING game plans. It just wouldn’t work for the team to follow one coach on one play and the other coach on the next one. Teams need ONE leader. One boss.

It is the same in your personal life, and in your spiritual life. If you want your life to be cohesive, to make sense, to go somewhere good and to accomplish something worthwhile, you need ONE leader, ONE boss. Or, to borrow a word from our text: ONE MASTER. That is exactly what Jesus said to His followers in the Sermon on the Mount – *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God AND money”* (vs. 24). Wherein Jesus mentions MONEY, this principle doesn’t apply ONLY to money. This is just the application Jesus was making at this point in His message. He was talking about money, so He reminded His listeners that you can’t serve God AND money. Money isn’t the only competing master in our lives – but for most people it’s way up there, likely ahead of everything else. For some, however, it’s a different master in competition: For some it’s addictive behaviors, for some it’s sex, for some it’s power, and for some it’s just old-fashioned selfishness: living ONLY for oneself. Here Jesus says, you CAN’T serve TWO masters.

I’m thinking I kind of had three masters when I was in college. There was the school, who expected that I maintain a certain GPA. There was my Christian Service or ministry assignments – speaking, playing the keyboard, singing, children’s church ministry. That was gratis work, but I had to have so many hours to graduate. And that was the hands-on, practical part – probably my favorite part, and maybe the most productive part. Then there were the jobs I needed to survive, for financial reasons – driving school bus, clerk at the electric store, and stocking soda machines. Those three obligations were often in conflict with one another – especially the money-making jobs. I had to work my school schedule around my work schedule. I drove bus really early – before my classes. Then, I’d do my afternoon run following my classes. Should the boss at the electric store say, “I need you to work an extra shift tomorrow,” I might say, “I’m sorry, but I’ve got class, or I’ve got a Christian Service assignment.” He might say, “You can skip class one time and still finish school, or you can miss your church assignment one time and still get to Heaven, but if you miss work, you won’t have a job.” The more bosses you have, the more conflict and struggles you have to deal with. When you have more than one master – you love one and hate the other. It is hard to serve a multiplicity of masters, and yet, it rarely keeps us from trying. However, you can never become the person you were created to be when you spend your life seeking to satisfy TWO masters. There has to be a priority. There has to be a first. Seek FIRST the kingdom... I’m talking specifically today about your relationship with God. If you have been toying with the idea of living a “Jesus-and-something-else” lifestyle, today’s message will challenge you and encourage you and exhort you and entreat you to put that second would-be master aside, and develop instead a one-master mindset.

We're beginning a new series today. It's called **Fixed Focus**. I had two cataract surgeries the end of last year. Before that my glasses were rather thick and my vision wasn't so sharp. The night before my first surgery, I had Diane drive and I removed my glasses. You wouldn't have wanted to have been a passenger if I were driving without my glasses, BUT after surgery it was rather amazing. For the first time in 40 some years, I could drive without glasses because things were IN focus. I can see the text on the TV screen. I can see the light reflecting on your face from your cell phone. I can read the clock on the back wall – not that I'm going to. I can see you sleeping on the back row. Life is so much better when it's focused. This series is designed to help us discover the power of intentional FOCUSED living.

There are some things in life that you get only one of. You have ONE LIFE to live. ONE CHANCE at life. No repeats, no recycling, no going back to the crib and starting again. We had ONE chance at 2018. One chance at January 2019. You get ONE life. And we need to live the ONE life we've been given with ONE objective, ONE PRIMARY PURPOSE. In order to do this best, we need to serve ONE master and ONE MASTER ONLY – our Lord Jesus Christ. So, in this series, we'll look at some of the "ONES" that require our EXCLUSIVE attention. Today is a BIGGIE, because we're talking about whatever it is that stands in competition with the Lordship of Jesus. As I said, it could be money, or it could be any number of things. In today's text, Jesus uses the example of money, and He teaches some principles about how we should deal with money when it becomes a distracting force in our lives. However, you can apply these to any area that stands between you and a life of commitment to Jesus. If you want to live a ONE-LORD lifestyle, and you find yourself in competition with all of these other things vying to take charge of your life, there are three things you need to do in order to keep Jesus FIRST in your life. And, I will hasten to say that this is not just a one-time decision you make in a flurry of emotion. This is a DAILY pursuit. We deny self AND put Jesus first EVERY DAY. First of all, in order to live a ONE-LORD lifestyle, make it your daily objective to...

1. SET THE DIRECTION OF YOUR HEART. Jesus said, *"Do NOT store up for yourselves treasures on EARTH, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. BUT store up for yourselves treasures in HEAVEN, where moths and vermin DO NOT destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also"* (vs. 19-21). What do you treasure? What's MOST important to you? One's heart tends to follow the direction of one's money, and your money tends to follow the direction of your heart. It's an endless loop. By looking at your checkbook or your bank statement, I could pretty much tell where your treasure is. What's one way to tell a person REALLY loves the Lord? They are generous to the Lord's work. They honor the Lord with their TITHE & OFFERINGS. What Jesus is saying here is that IF MONEY is your obstacle, and if GREED is your God, then GIVING is the BEST way to move your heart in the right direction. If money is in the way of your ability to surrender completely to the Lordship of Jesus, then LOOSENING YOUR grip on money is the best way to LOOSEN MONEY'S GRIP on you. Of course, there are those who will say, "Well, money isn't really an obstacle for me. It's something else. It's a dysfunctional relationship. It's gaming. It's sports. It's an addiction. It's pride. It's selfishness." And the list goes on. Regardless of what the obstacle might be, the principle for dealing with it is the same. Every day you need to pave a new path – the RIGHT path – for your heart to follow. YOU chart that path. In Jesus' words, YOU store up a new treasure. If you do it right, your storehouse is NOT the TEMPORAL earth, but the ETERNAL Heaven. If the obstacle in your life, for example, is an unhealthy and inappropriate attitude toward sex, you move away from whatever feeds that appetite, and you move toward something better. If the obstacle in your life is any kind of addictive behavior, you move away from whatever feeds that obsession, and you move toward something better. Investing your money in ministries and projects that have eternal value will jump-start your heart and get it moving in the right direction. In the same way, investing your time, energy, effort and attention in projects that are edifying and uplifting will also give your heart the start it needs to get moving in the direction it needs to go. If you want to live with a FOCUSed life – with ONE master – then you need to take the first step toward loosening the grip that the competing master or masters have on your life. You begin by paving a path in your daily life that your heart will be able to follow. *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*

2. TAKE YOUR THOUGHT LIFE TO THE NEXT LEVEL. In verse 25, Jesus begins talking about worry and He makes reference to many of the things we tend to obsess about – both the BASICS of life and the COMFORTS of life – and He tells us: "You don't need to worry about those things." I love the wording in the King James Version. *"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink... Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?"* (vs. 25&27). "Taking thought" is a phrase that refers to being anxious or worried. Then in verse 31 he says, *"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat?"* There's a strong CONNECTION between what we THINK and what we SAY. The MORE WE THINK ABOUT IT, the more we TALK about it; the MORE WE TALK ABOUT IT, the more we THINK about it – and pretty soon this attitude – this lack of trust in the provision of God – completely dominates our mindset and behavior. One of the things that prevents us from living a one-Lord lifestyle is that we find it difficult to put

our trust in Him, and Him alone. We find it difficult to believe that He will provide for us. We entertain this idea in the back of our mind that maybe, just maybe, we can't depend on Him for EVERYTHING...maybe, just maybe, He'll let us down when we need Him most. Jesus said this about all of our worries and anxieties – *“These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers...”* (NLT). If there is someone or something competing for the title of Lord in your life, their greatest stronghold will likely be in your thoughts. They will try to get in the way of your devotion to Jesus Christ by getting in the way of how you think. If money could talk, if it could place thoughts in your head, it would certainly say, “You need me more than you need God.” If addictive behavior could talk, it would certainly say, “You need me more than you need God.” That's what every distracting influence would say to you: “What will God do for you, REALLY? What about the basics? What about the comforts? What if He leaves you high and dry?” If you want to live a one-Lord lifestyle, then you will have to decide TODAY – and put into practice EACH AND EVERY DAY – that certain thoughts are simply off limits: “I can't dwell on my doubts. I can't dwell on my fears. I will take no thought of such things. Not today. Not EVER!” When you move your thought life to the next level, you STOP thinking about all that can go wrong, and you START thinking about the goodness of God – His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, His plan for your life. Verse 33 – *“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...”* I'm saying if you want to live a one-Lord lifestyle, put JESUS at the TOP or your WHAT-TO-THINK-ABOUT list.

3. MAKE TODAY YOUR PRIORITY. We all have a tendency to want to live in one of two places where we don't belong. One is in the PAST – because it was either so good or so bad that we just can't bring ourselves to let it go. The other is the FUTURE. That's because we either fool ourselves into believing that the future will magically become perfect, even if we do nothing about it today; OR we obsessively dwell on the gloom-and-doom of the future because we're so afraid that the worst is sure to happen. EITHER way, whether it's the future OR the past, whether you think it was good OR bad, it prevents you from focusing on that which most needs your attention. I'm talking about TODAY. I'm talking about THIS MOMENT. Jesus said, *“Therefore DO NOT worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own”* (vs. 34). Later in the series we'll likely talk about how we have one life to live, one day at a time. The one-Lord lifestyle has little to do with the past, and little to do with the future, BUT it has EVERYTHING to do with TODAY, THIS MOMENT! Many people live their lives with good intentions, thinking, “Eventually I will be fully committed to what I know is right and what I know is true...but not just yet. I'm not quite ready.” And they wonder why money keeps getting in the way, and compulsive behavior keeps getting in the way, and [toxic] relationships keep getting in the way. It's because you can't really live a one-Lord lifestyle in the past or the future. The past is gone. The future isn't here yet, SO...You can ONLY live it TODAY! TODAY JESUS needs to be front and center.

CONCLUSION. Some otherwise brilliant football coaches have sabotaged their success – at least for a while – with the idea that they could win with a two-quarterback system, but it's never been done, not consistently. It's just the nature of the game of football: One team, One quarterback, One leader. Some Christians have likewise sabotaged their success with the idea that they could live a Jesus-AND-someTHING-else or Jesus-AND-someONE-else lifestyle. But, it will never work. Inevitably, as Jesus calls you one direction – the direction of truth and goodness and holiness – the other master is calling you elsewhere – in a direction that's way less than God's best. Many a direction leads to nowhere good. It's IMPOSSIBLE to move in TWO DIRECTIONS at the same time, so today I am challenging you to answer the call that Christ is extending to ALL of us. I'm NOT talking about yesterday or tomorrow, but I'm talking about TODAY. Pave a path for your heart to follow into His presence...Focus your thoughts exclusively on Him, and...Live this day as if it matters most of all.