

[In Deuteronomy 8:17-18, Moses reminded the people:] You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth.

- 1 Money has been causing issues for a long time—not just in today's times. Moses gave his warning in the mid-1400s BC. Jesus talks about it in our Gospel Lesson. So, what's His point?
- 2 Well, He actually gives it quite clearly in verses 8-9. So, let's read up to that point. {Read verses 1-9.} Believers have historically had a hard time with this parable because Jesus commends a dishonest man. So again, what's the point? It is *not* that we should be dishonest and Jesus will commend us. (That's a *shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?* type of thing.) To find the point, we have to ask the following: What's the point of comparison? {Reread verses 8-9.}
- 3 The point of comparison is that we are supposed to be just as shrewd about how we use our money as people who put money first in their lives. What does that look like? That's where verse 9 comes in! worldly wealth is literally "mammon of unrighteousness." Wow! What a phrase! *Mammon* is the desire for wealth that has an evil influence on you. Jesus connects it with unrighteousness. But what's neat is that Jesus tells us to use worldly wealth [mammon of unrighteousness]. Even the things of this world are to be used to serve God's good purpose. If we can use our money to connect with someone in Jesus, and that someone goes to heaven before us, then that someone can welcome us when we get there too.
- 4 What's great about that point of comparison is that using money is not self-serving. It's being used in service to God. Instead of shrewd "strategies" to network for our own benefit, it's shrewd genuine interest and concern for the souls of others. And people know the difference when we're being kind for ourselves or being kind for the Lord. And note that Jesus says, "When it is gone..." If it's gonna go, how much better to use it for something good!
- 5 Jesus builds on that point of comparison with the rest of the reading. {Read verses 10-13.} What's the point of comparison here? Worldly wealth really isn't worth much in God's eyes. It's obviously worth something: eating and clothing ourselves and living in our homes is nice. But spiritual things are worth so much more. They affect both our bodies *and* our souls. Christ's death on the cross for us was priceless. But it wasn't cheap. It took love, putting our needs ahead of His own. God did not hate us even though He has every right to do so when we think pieces of paper and metal or the plastic and tech we use to move it around are more important than God. God deals in the currency of perfect blood shed to draw us to Him with forgiveness for shrewdness used only for ourselves. Forgiveness leads us to embrace God and see others as those who need to hear about God's forgiveness too.
- 6 Two more things in this sermon: drawing out verse 13 a little bit more (what's the point of comparison in the words Jesus uses) and a little exercise to help us remember what the point is all about.

- 7 Let's start with verse 13. {Reread verse 13.} The word for masters is *Lords*. Who is the Lord in our life: the God of the Scriptures or the stuff around us? If we try to do both, Jesus draws out what happens in a couple of powerful pictures (points) of comparison. If we try to do both, we hate one (which means we would kill it if we could, but just can't get away with it) and love the other (which means put it first). These are mutually exclusive and are in the heart. So instead of serving both, the heart is divided. The second picture (point) of comparison has to do with duplicity (double-dealing, doing one thing and thinking another). Being devoted to one master has the picture of embracing that master, all the while thinking against the other one. So, in trying to serve two masters, the service to the one a person actually likes is ruined by thinking evil about the other one. And the saddest thing of all, is that people think they have control when they choose to serve two masters. We aren't in control to begin with! We have to serve one. So, let's serve the Lord, not money.
- 8 Now to the second thing to wrap up: a little exercise. Have you ever tried to explain money to a little child? It's full of *what's the point* type of questions. It goes a little like this: "What's money?" —*Money is paper we use to buy things.* "I have some paper right here. I'll make some." —*No, we don't get to make money. The government does.* "How come their money works and mine doesn't?" —*People have agreed that we'll use their money.* "So, it's make-believe just like mine but everybody says is real?" —*Because we say it's real, we act like it's real.*
- 9 And so the questions go on. The thing the child is struggling with is that money is a human creation and convention. So it's subject to human characteristics, which is a fancy way of saying it's messed up. That means if people serve it, that's messed up too. God be praised that we serve Him. We remember the Lord our God Who dealt in perfect currency when it came to our being—body and soul: His righteous blood. So, we're content to serve the One Who served us, using what He's given us to share the good news of the salvation Jesus freely won. That's the point. God loves us, we love Him back. Amen.