

"UNIFYING OUR LIVES"

PREACHED: Park Avenue

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TEXT: Matthew 6: 23 - 24.

Queen Victoria of England once had a serious quarrel with her husband, Prince Albert. After the quarrel was over, Prince Albert went to his room and locked the door. Victoria followed him and knocked on the door in great anger. "Who's there?" asked Albert. The reply was, "The Queen of England. Open this door!" But Albert didn't unlock the door. Victoria knocked again. The same question and answer were repeated several times. Then there was a pause followed by a gentle knock. "Who's there?" said Albert. This time the reply was different. "Your wife" said the Queen softly. "May I come in?" And Albert opened the door immediately.

We are all like the Queen. Each of us houses more than one personality. The same individual may be both queen and wife...angel and devil.....Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Sometimes we're ruled by our passions.....sometimes by our high ideals. It's this conflict that keeps us in hot water with ourselves and with our own private world.

Jesus warned us against the dangers of a divided life when he said:

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon....."

His words leave little room for compromise for those who like to live with two faces. The statement says that it is impossible to live a double life. In this passage, Jesus is saying that life is to be made whole. It needs to be unified. It needs to be mastered by some single dominant purpose. Otherwise it falls apart. When God is master of our lives, then we are the masters of life itself.

"No man can serve two masters....."

This is one of the most familiar statements of Jesus and yet it is in many ways one of the most neglected of all his teachings. There are three ideas growing out of this verse which I would like to mention.

FIRST: It speaks of the impossibility of moral and spiritual neutrality.

One Sunday morning, on returning to the White House after attending a church service, Calvin Coolidge was met at the front door by his wife.

"HOW WAS THE SERMON TODAY, CAL?" she asked. Calvin Coolidge, a Vermonter and a man of few words, said, "GOOD."

"WHAT WAS IT ABOUT CAL?" He replied, "SIN".

"WHAT DID THE MINISTER HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT?" He replied, "HE WAS AGAINST IT!"

The story makes us smile, but it also reminds us that as Christians there are a few things that we should be against. If we take the words of Jesus seriously, then there can be no fence sitting where moral and spiritual values are at stake. This teaching of Jesus is not some pious doctrine that we can either accept or reject. It's a law of life, and there's no escape from it. We live in a universe governed by moral law. We're forced to take sides whether we want to or not.

In the world of the spirit, if we're not for something then we're against it. To refuse to take a positive stand for the right and good, means that in effect we're supporting the bad and the evil, whether we admit to it or not.

"No man can serve two masters" said Jesus.

In other words, there's no middle ground. Our influence reaches up or it pulls down. It never remains on dead level.

We encounter some moral confusion at this very point. We find ourselves living in a society that thinks it is polite and modern and fashionable to affect a broad-minded tolerance before both goodness and evil. Tolerance is a virtue. But there are dangers inherent in a broadminded tolerance which refuses to take a position either for or against the wrongs of our society.

There are glaring evils in our society today to which we should never become comfortably adjusted.

A nation which spends 24 billion dollars on alcoholic drinks and gambling and only 3 billion dollars on educating its children is courting moral disintegration.....

Any nation which spends three times as much on tobacco as it does on the support of its churches is facing spiritual decay....

Meanwhile the evil of segregation continues, and meanwhile one out of every four marriages ends up in the divorce courts.....

HOW TOLERANT CAN THE CHRISTIAN BE? We need to go beyond tolerance to understanding within the framework of a Christian conscience. We need to go beyond understanding to decision and to action. We cannot remain neutral before Jesus. We are either for him or against him. The Gospel of Jesus has the power to turn life inside out and upside down. It can change life....if only we'd give it opportunity.

It's a risky venture, and many of us don't want to take the chance.....

We'd rather be popular than right.....

We all want to be Christians, but we also want to be comfortable.....

We like our ruts, and we don't like to have our plans upset.....

If we take these words of Jesus seriously, then there's no room for fence sitting. The Christian religion is not for cowards or weaklings. It calls for a high order of devotion. It can be disturbing. It can get under your skin and bother you.....BUT our own faith becomes alive and vital as with God's help, we dare to challenge the wrongs of our own time.

"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other....."

SECOND: The words of Jesus declare the need for unity in personality.

Unity in personality is a necessity. The unified life is psychologically necessary if we are to live comfortably with ourselves and effectively in our world. Our inner nature requires that we come to some unity within ourselves. We can't live with PURPOSE and POWER when our personalities are scattered and our central loyalties are divided.

To be sure, there are plenty of people who attempt to do this very thing. Scattered personalities are victims of a scattering civilization. Here's the way a newspaper describes the many influences that pull and twist us out of shape:

"The present evils which afflict the country have been produced by over-banking, over-trading, overspending, overliving, overdashing, overdriving, over-reaching, overheating, overplaying, overborrowing ..... and overacting of every kind and description."

It's interesting to note that this was in the New York Herald on May 3, 1837. Perhaps things are just beginning to catch up with us. We're told that there are close to 8 million people in this country who are victims of mental disorders. We're told that one out of every two patients in the country are psychiatric cases.....

Too many people are overliving because they're overburdened and overextended with overactivity. ~~Divided loyalties cause frayed nerves and disturbed minds.~~

The continuous tension that comes with the incessant pounding of outside events and the thrust of complex desires within must be resolved. Our very happiness depends on it. We need one central unifying principle or philosophy or personality big enough to command our total loyalty and around which life may be built. Without it, we're lost!

The uncertainty of the future.....

The swift tempo of life.....

The muddle of conflicting ideas.....

All of these demand a unified life!

Perhaps you're wondering how this is to be done. A psychologist by the name of G. George Fox has said that a chief ingredient of this unifying principle is:

"A Feeling that life has a positive view...  
that we don't come and go without a purpose;  
that there is a Divine Planner who directs  
the universe even though we don't fully  
understand it....."

In other words, when we quit trying to serve two or more masters and begin to serve one supreme, divine master, things straighten out for us. We discover peace instead of turmoil and tension.....

We then have a chance to attack the business of living with success and satisfaction.....

This is the key that transforms life.

If we really want peace of mind, then we had better get just one master.

The life that is unified around God is the life  
that is steady and serene.....

The life that lives for the great and good things  
always holds together.....

THIRD: The text stresses the importance of choosing and serving God  
as master!

We're not helpless creatures of circumstance. We have the power  
of choice. The argument that we have no control over the course of life  
is contrary to all human experience. A man may choose his gods. We may  
allow ourselves to drift with the tide of events or passions. But we  
don't have to.

We may choose to serve mammon.....

We may choose to serve God.....

We may choose, more than that - WE MUST CHOOSE.

For we cannot serve both.

There are many choices before us. There are choices that have to  
do with our ideas of success.....our health.....our future.....our relation  
to others.....But Jesus is confronting us with only one choice - The  
greatest of all.

#### YE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON

Jesus was wise enough to know that our decision at this one point  
would affect all the other decisions of life. Is it not true that once  
we have established an over all direction of life toward God and the  
things of God, we are able to resolve our conflicts and make our minor  
choices with greater insight and certainty.

This word MAMMON actually means property. We may think of it as  
representing worldiness in any of its forms. Jesus is saying that  
at the central control of life we are going to have to choose

between love of God and love of gold.....

between the service of God and the service of things....

between the worship of God and the worship of self.

And unless we choose to serve God, we will be at the call of a thousand  
earthly masters....

The experiences of Philip Gabot, a Harvard graduate and the son of  
a notable family, demonstrate the effect of such a shift in the center  
of life. The strong cross currents of life had driven him to the brink  
of a physical and moral breakdown. His doctor ordered him to give up  
his business and take a rest cure. On the verge of despair, he went to  
the seclusion of his camp in the Connecticut Valley. He took along with  
him a stack of detective novels to read. But soon these bored him. He  
quite casually began to glance through the MEANING OF PRAYER by Harry  
Emerson Fosdick which someone had given him to read. He became  
fascinated and absorbed. He said later of this experience:

"It seemed in worship, or prayer, and in my  
Bible, the solution to the riddle of my  
universe had been revealed to me; for I was  
living in a new world of peace, beauty, and  
gladness such as I had never conceived.....  
That condition has continued, except that I

have returned to the world of men to take up again my daily chores with the keenest of interest and with a sureness of touch and an absence of worry and excitement, and my health has continued to improve in a remarkable way."

Philip Cabot discovered the beauty and power of a life unified in the reality of God. And there have been others who have made this same thrilling discovery.

I think of Augustine, the great man of the 4th century who in his early years led a life of wild dissipation. Satisfying his appetites and the lust of the flesh, he sank to a very low level of life. As he himself said in his CONFESSIONS:

"So small a boy, and so great a sinner."

Searching for the meaning of life in pagan philosophy, he housed a scattered soul. The crisis of his life occurred one afternoon in Milan in the year 386. With feelings of disgust and self-condemnation playing on his mind, he is reported to have heard a voice say: TAKE UP AND READ. He reached for a copy of Paul's Letter to the Romans, and his eyes fell on the words:

"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof....."

From that moment on Augustine had the peace of mind and the sense of a unified life which comes only to those who choose God and serve God as master. It was this same man who wrote in later years:

"O God, Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."

This may be for us too, the solution to our own particular problem. For you see, no man really can serve two masters.....either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

#### OR SUCH IS THE UNIFIED LIFE.

FIRST: It speaks of the impossibility of spiritual and moral neutrality.  
SECOND: It emphasizes the need for unity in personality.  
THIRD: It stresses the importance of choosing and serving God as master.

LET US PRAY: Our Father, we are beginning to see the great <sup>DEMANDS</sup> challenge that our faith makes upon us. We know that we have been choosing ~~and serving~~ many false Gods....We know too that we should serve only Thee. Give us the strength and wisdom to go steadily on our ~~life~~ way always trying to follow the way of life that Jesus proclaimed. This we ask in thy name. Amen.