

Who are You Serving?

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning everyone. My name is Alistair, I'm on the staff here and I just want to add my welcome to Paul's. It is great to see you this morning. That was a difficult passage to read, wasn't it?

Maybe there were bits of it which made us feel a little bit uncomfortable, a bit of it maybe a bit confused. So let's ask for God's strength and wisdom as we turn to this passage. Let's pray together.

Loving God and Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for every part of your word, for all that it has to teach us. And we pray that this morning as we look at this passage that Alistair read to us, Lord, we pray that you would help us understand it and that we would glorify you as we put it into our lives.

In Jesus' name we pray these things. Amen. Decisions are part of our everyday life, aren't they? So you make decisions every single day. But I think there are two different kinds of decisions.

So you have the decisions which aren't really important, and then you have decisions which are really, really important. So for example, decisions that aren't very important. They have no significance for your life, no consequences of your life.

[1 : 1 2] So what you had for breakfast this morning, pretty insignificant. When someone asks you, do you want tea or coffee, pretty insignificant. When you came into church this morning, depending on who you are, and you looked at the biscuit plate, and you chose which biscuit to have, that's a pretty insignificant decision.

It has no bearing on your life. But then you have decisions which hold huge bearings and ramifications for your life. Some decisions leave you at a crossroad.

If you go one way, it will change your life again. Two different ways. And decisions like this demand a radical response.

So for example, many of you will know that my wife Sabina works with the refugee and asylum-seeking community here in Edinburgh. And many of the stories that these wonderful people have to tell you will bring you to tears.

Many of them have stood at this crossroad and they've made a very difficult decision. Do they flee their own country? Do they risk their lives on sea and land?

[2 : 2 3] Or do they stay in their country and face war and face terrible danger, both for themselves and their families? Now both of these decisions has a consequence, a huge consequence on their life.

And it's not an easy decision to make. Many of them have stood at this crossroad. And they've made a decision which has affected the rest of their lives. Their situation required a radical response.

Now I would like to say this morning that each of us stands at this crossroad. And Jesus this morning is presenting us with a question which requires a radical response from each of us.

It requires a radical decision. And our decision is of the utmost importance. And the question that Jesus is asking us this morning is, Who are you serving?

Who is it that you revolve your life around? Who are you serving? That's the question that Jesus is asking his disciples and religious leaders of his day.

[3 : 24] And that's the question that Jesus is asking us from Luke 16, verse 1 to 18. Who are you serving? But we need to remember that this passage has a context. So it is in Luke's gospel.

Luke's orderly account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And more specifically, it is within a section which started in Luke chapter 13, verse 22.

And will end at Luke chapter 17, verse 10. And the big question running through this section, the big teaching point, is who will be in the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is referring to the place we call heaven.

So who will be in heaven? What does it look like to be a follower of Jesus? And this morning Jesus emphasizes that point by asking the question, Who are you serving?

And Jesus gives two opposing options. So Jesus says, Who are you serving? Are you serving God or money? And then secondly Jesus says, Who are you serving?

[4 : 24] Are you serving Jesus or the law? Now, our answer to this question is not insignificant. It is one of those decisions which has huge bearings on our life.

Eternal bearings on our life. So with that question in mind, Who are you serving? Let's dive in and see what Jesus has to say. The first two options that Jesus gives are, Are you serving God or are you serving money?

Verses 1 to 13, God or money? Now, if you look at Luke chapter 16, verse 1, you'll see that Jesus is speaking to the disciples. But verse 14 says that the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the day, were also within earshot of this conversation.

So Jesus is speaking to his followers and the religious leaders who are standing at a distance listening in. So the parable and the point that Jesus is going to make in this section this morning is a kind of a two-edged sword.

He is warning his disciples that they need to decide who they're going to serve. Are you going to serve God or are you going to serve money? And he's warning the Pharisees and rebuking them by saying, Well, who are you serving with your lives?

[5 : 36] Are you serving God or are you serving money? Now, as this parable was read to us, maybe you were a bit confused. I know I certainly was when I first read it. It seems a little bit strange.

But I think the main teaching point of what Jesus is saying is there in verse 13 of chapter 16. Jesus says you cannot serve two masters.

You cannot serve both God and money. And to illustrate this point, Jesus being the best storyteller that ever lived tells a story. There was a rich man who owned a lot of land and he hired a manager to look after it all.

To look after the business affairs, to collect in the profit, to secure the smooth running of his business. However, he didn't get a very good manager, did he?

See, in fact, this manager seems to be wasting his boss's possessions. Now, that's the same phrase that's used in the prodigal son. So, it's not that the manager is being fraudulent. He isn't stealing money.

[6 : 34] He's simply just throwing it away. He's wasting his boss's money. He's doing the exact opposite of what his job description is. And the worst thing is that he actually knows he's doing it.

You see that in verses 2 and 3. When the rich man brings in the manager and tells him of what he's heard and he fires him on the spot. The manager sits and hears all this and he doesn't even defend himself.

He doesn't say anything. He stands there and says, yep, sure, definitely. Now, whenever you get told off for something by your boss at work, if you are innocent, you usually defend yourself, don't you?

Or if you can remember back to the times when you were a child, when you'd always knew that if you were in trouble and your full name was used, man, it was going to be bad. So if I was upstairs in my bedroom and I heard my mom scream from downstairs, Alistair Scott Chalmers, get down here right now.

Ouch. I knew it wasn't going to be pretty. And it was usually because somebody had broken something. And it was usually me, if I'm honest. But if it wasn't me, and I knew it wasn't me, I'd defend myself.

[7 : 45] And I'd usually throw one of my brothers under the bus in the process. But if I didn't do that, I would definitely defend myself. I would claim that I was innocent. But this manager does nothing. He has a dilemma on his hands.

He has no job. And he thinks to himself, well, I'm too weak to do manual labor. I'm too ashamed to go and beg. What do I do? Well, he comes up with the idea that has rightly given him the name the dishonest manager.

He devises a deceitful plan to secure favor in people's eyes. So he calls in the people who owed the rich man money. Probably a backlog of unpaid rent for a field or for the use of some of his workers.

Now, these are not small amounts that these guys owe. The first guy that we read about, if you're reading the NIV, it will say that he owes the rich man 3,000 liters of olive oil.

That is a huge debt. That is approximately one year's produce of 150 fruitful olive trees. Or in terms of money, that is approximately three years of wages for the average worker of that day.

[8 : 58] This is a huge debt. And the manager says, you know what, my friends, you take your bill. You sit down quickly before my boss arrives and I will give you a 50% discount.

Now, the guy who has the debt is sitting there thinking, boom, great. What a generous guy. So gracious, so forgiving. But we can sit here and know the full story and we know the ulterior motives are at play.

And so he carries on. He calls in the second person who has an even bigger debt. 30 tons of wheat. A huge debt. Approximately a year's worth of harvest for 100 acres.

Again, in terms of money, it's almost a whole decade of the average wage of a person in that day. And the manager says, you know what, you come in, you take your bill, you sit down and I'll give you a 20% discount.

Unbelievable, isn't it? How this man is just throwing away his boss's money. And we can see, can't we, why this man is now being known as the dishonest manager. But in verse 8, the rich man commends the manager because he has set himself up.

[10 : 09] He commends the manager because he was without a job. He had no money. He had no way to make a living. No way to look after himself. But he was thinking ahead. He set himself up for the future.

And that is why the rich man commends him. But it doesn't say that the rich man is happy with him, does it? I mean, of course he isn't. He's just taken a whole bunch of his money.

Now you might be surprised that the rich man commends him, even though he just cheated him out of money. And the reason this happened is because the point that Jesus is trying to make, see Jesus is going to use this negative example of a man to teach us something positive.

Jesus is not saying that we should be like this dishonest manager in every way. But he explains in verses 9 to 13 the application of this parable.

And I think there are two applications that Jesus draws out. The first is that followers of Jesus should live for eternity. So Jesus uses this negative story to teach a positive truth.

[11 : 14] Jesus says that like this manager, his followers are to think of the future. Like this manager, they are to think of the future and have their eternity in mind.

Jesus is not praising the manager for how he dealt with this situation. But he is using this negative example to teach us something positive. Yes, we live in the here and now.

Yes, we live in Edinburgh in 2017. But we're to be thinking of the future. We're to be thinking of eternity. Yes, we need finances here and now.

We need to look after ourselves. But God is saying, you were created for eternity. Remember that. And live in light of that. And Jesus is saying in verses 8 and 9 that we should be using our finances.

Specifically in light of eternity. So Jesus says the people of this world, meaning people who are not his followers. They use their money in a shrewd way to get what they want.

[12 : 18] To get what they want out of life. And Jesus is saying that his followers should be using their money for eternity. Jesus' followers should be using their finances for the good of his kingdom.

For the good of heaven. See, the people of this world use their money and they invest it in short-term interests. Stuff that will affect them here and now. But followers of Jesus are to invest their money in the long-term interests.

In fact, in eternal interests. Now this ties in very nicely with what Bruce was teaching us last Sunday night from James chapter 1 and 2. If you weren't here and you haven't heard that sermon, I would highly recommend that you go online and listen to it.

And in his sermon, Bruce used a very powerful illustration of what it would look like to meet a person in heaven who we have helped. Because we've invested our money in eternity.

How amazing would it be that if on that day when we arrive in heaven, someone comes up to us, wraps their arms around us, and thanks us so much because we supported them in their greatest time of need.

[13 : 26] Now we've never met the person. But maybe you sent that bag of rice and a Bible to the family of a pastor who was in prison. And this person is thanking you because you cared, because you invested your money in eternity.

You used your money that God had given you to bless people and to bless the kingdom of heaven. And the second application that Jesus brings out is that we should be faithful.

So that we should live for eternity and that we should be faithful. Jesus says that his followers should be faithful even in the little things, in something as small as our finances. Because when we are faithful in the little things, it is evidence that we will be faithful in the bigger things.

William Hendrickson, a Bible commentator, says this, If you have not been trustworthy in the use of material wealth, which after all is not really yours, but belongs to God, then who will trust you with the true heavenly riches which are your possessions, namely the kingdom of God prepared for you from the foundation of the world?

Jesus is saying that his followers should be faithful in something as small as their finances. Why? Because you cannot serve two masters.

[14 : 41] You cannot serve both God and money. See, money will leave you to live a comfortable life here on earth. Money will be taken up with your family, with friends, with houses, with material possessions, all of which are great things and things that we need if they're kept in the right place.

But Jesus says that one day all of that will vanish and we'll be left with nothing. But if you serve God and you use your money accordingly, you'll be giving to your church.

You'll be giving to missions as we were thinking about yesterday. You'll be helping the spread of the gospel financially. You'll be helping train gospel workers all over the world.

You'll be giving money to support Christians in starving countries and Christians who cannot read the Bible. If you do all of this, then we'll be serving God with our money.

So let me ask us the question this morning. Who are you serving? One of the easiest ways to check this out is probably to look at our bank statements.

[15 : 45] Is all of our money going on our mortgage, our car, food, entertainment, fun, books, whatever it may be. You put that in. None of these are bad things.

They really aren't. And Jesus isn't expecting us to give up everything, to become ascetics and refuse ourselves every kind of pleasure or entertainment. But this should challenge us to think about how we use our money for world missions.

And how we support our brothers and sisters across the globe. If we are Christians, our desire should be to see the kingdom of God supported financially. To see more people hearing about Jesus.

We should be supporting those organizations who are translating the Bible. So that one day everyone can read the word of God in their own language. That they can understand it. Do you know how many languages in the world don't have any form of Bible translation in their own language today?

Approximately 1,800 languages across the world have no access to the Bible. Or if you go on the Open Doors website, you'll see a list of 50 different countries in which Christians are persecuted.

[17 : 00] And that isn't all of them. That's just the 50 that persecute Christians the worst. And the question is, are we helping them? That's what it would look like for us to invest our money in eternity.

So who are we serving this morning? The second two options that Jesus gives when he's asking the question, who are you serving? Is are you serving Jesus or are you serving the law?

Verses 14 to 18. Are you serving Jesus or the law? Now the law is referring to the Old Testament laws that were given specifically to the nation of Israel. We read about these in Leviticus, a great Bible study to mention.

So they're laws about food, about clothing, the sacrificial system, and how Israel as a nation was supposed to live. And Jesus is asking specifically the Pharisees now, who are you serving?

Jesus, are you serving me or are you serving the law? Now the Pharisees would have heard everything Jesus was just saying about how followers must serve God and not money.

[18 : 08] And he said that those people who want to be in heaven, who want to be in the presence of God forever, they need to serve God. And notice how Luke sneaks in that little comment there in verse 14.

In verse 14, Luke says, the Pharisees were lovers of money. And as a result of their love of money, they sneer at Jesus' teaching. Now these were the religious leaders of the day.

They were supposed to be leading Israel and pointing them towards God. They were supposed to be helping people live a godly life. They were to be godly examples of what it means to be right with God.

And when they hear Jesus say that it's either God or money, they lift their noses and they scoff. You know that look that the bad guy gives the good guy in the movie when he looks like he's just about to be defeated.

Or maybe that look of complete unbelief you have when somebody says something which doesn't sit well with you. Maybe they say something funny and you kind of scoff a wee bit at them.

[19 : 14] That is exactly what the Pharisees were doing simply because Jesus wasn't in their crowd. Jesus wasn't part of their gang. You see, they thought that they were the ones who upheld the law.

They thought that they were the holy ones. I mean, they dedicated their lives to God. They'd obeyed the law of God to the T. In fact, they had even created more laws to protect themselves from breaking God's law.

Now that might sound like a good thing on the surface, but it actually wasn't. It made them become legalistic. See, they went through all the outward motions.

They did what was right in the eyes of people. They thought they were so convinced of their own acceptability before God that they despised other people without any pangs of conscience.

But do you see how Jesus pulls the rug from under their feet with five simple words? But God knows your hearts. Ouch. These men were the religious elite.

[20 : 19] Surely their hearts were in the right place. They were living the religious life. They went to the synagogue. They obeyed the food laws. They rebuked those that didn't.

They didn't mingle with the sinners, with the tax collectors, with the Greeks. They didn't do any of that. They stayed as far away from them as possible. They looked good on the outside. And that was the problem.

They made sure they looked good on the outside. They justified themselves before people. They looked the part and they made sure everybody saw it. But Jesus says, you can have all of that, but God knows your hearts.

And the truth is that what people value in this world is detestable in God's sight. Now we can go to church every Sunday. We can listen well to the sermon.

We can take notes. We can sing wholeheartedly. We can go through all of the outward motions, drop a few Bible verses into our conversations. Because we know exactly what people want to hear.

[21 : 23] And we know exactly what people want to see us do. But at the end of the day, let me just say this, that God knows our hearts. Now I wish somebody would have told me this when I was younger.

When I was growing up in the church. I wish somebody would have shocked me up with the truth that all of my outward religion melts away.

And God sees my very core. That may be a truth that you need to hear this morning. That God sees your heart.

Do not strive for the approval of humans, for the approval of man. But strive for the approval of God. Because God knows your heart. Strive for Jesus.

See, the Pharisees could impress people, but they couldn't impress God. Because he saw them for who they were. Stiff and proud sinners, like everyone else. These men loved the law.

[22 : 20] But they loved the law so much that it blinded them to the fact that the Son of God was standing right in front of them. Jefferson Bethke, who has a very famous video on YouTube called Jesus versus religion, says this about religion.

The problem with religion is that it doesn't get to the core. Religion is just behavior modification like a long list of chores. Now the Pharisees were going through this long list of chores.

They were prisoners to their own traditions and prejudices. And all of this blinded them to the fact that Jesus was right in front of them. That God's salvation was being offered to them through the person of Jesus.

The kingdom of God, the invitation to the kingdom of God was there. But religion blinded them. The law and the prophets were proclaimed until John the Baptist.

He was the last messenger of the Old Testament, the Old Covenant. He was the last messenger who pointed forward to the coming of Jesus. But now Jesus has arrived.

[23 : 28] Now things are going to be different, Jesus says. Now the kingdom of God is going to be preached. See, the whole Old Testament pointed forward to Jesus. Pointed forward to God's King who would come and end man's separation from God.

But now that the King has arrived, now that Jesus is here, He's made it possible for us to be reconciled with God. Now people are striving to enter through the narrow door.

That's what Jesus is saying at the end of verse 16. People are striving to enter into the kingdom of God, to enter into heaven, through the window of salvation that Jesus has opened up to the world.

People are now striving to be followers of Jesus. But this does not make the Old Testament irrelevant for us as Christians today. Do you see in verse 17 how important the Old Testament was to Jesus?

Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but He came to fulfill it.

[24 : 43] So many people think today that Christians should only be focusing on reading the New Testament. That churches should only be preaching through the New Testament, but I would say that is a mistake.

We have so much to learn from the Old Testament. B.B. Warfield, a great theologian, says this, The Old Testament may be likened to a room richly furnished but dimly lit.

The introduction of light brings into it nothing which was not in it before, but it brings out into clearer view much of what is in it, but was only dimly or not even perceived at all before.

He goes on to say, The Old Testament revelation of God is not corrected by the New Testament revelation of God, but it is only perfected, extended, and enlarged.

Jesus isn't saying that the Old Testament is irrelevant. He isn't saying forget the Old Testament, but He is making sure that the Pharisees know that He has come to build on it. The Old Testament is the bedrock, the foundation, the beginnings, all pointing forward to Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

[25 : 57] And the Old Testament laws that you'll read about in Leviticus were written specifically to the people of Israel. But now the new people that Jesus is gathering as His church is no longer defined by political and ethnic unity.

Rather, they are a people of all nations, all ethnicities scattered among all political states, not identified with any one of them, but connected through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the laws which dealt with Israel as a state are no longer applied in the same way to the people of God because we are no longer a political entity. Followers of Jesus aren't a nation.

We are passers-by. We are citizens of heaven who are united unto the kingship of our Lord Jesus. And therefore, we are to live different and distinct lives.

Lives marked by a striving for the kingdom of God. Lives marked by the fact that once we were lost, but now we are found. Lives marked by the cost of following Jesus Christ.

[27 : 06] Now Jesus gives us an example of what this looks like in verse 18. But at this point, let me just slow down.

Let me just quickly say three things about this difficult topic of marriage, divorce, and remarriage. First of all, I want to acknowledge that this is not an easy topic for anyone to deal with.

Secondly, I want to make it clear that this is not everything Jesus has to teach on marriage, divorce, and remarriage in the Bible. We could go to Matthew. We could go here to Luke.

We could go to 1 Corinthians. This is not all Jesus has to say. And thirdly, I want us to remember that what Jesus is saying here in verse 16-18 has a context.

And that is important to understanding why Jesus is saying this. So let's remember that context. Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees at this point for how they had misused the law.

[28 : 08] And specifically, he uses marriage, divorce, and remarriage as an example of how they've misused the law. You see, there were some Pharisees who taught that divorce was only allowed under certain circumstances.

But there were other Pharisees who taught that even if your wife brought you burnt food, that that was sufficient grounds for a divorce. So Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees and the culture of their time for their casual view of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Why? Because God loves marriage. God wants marriage to succeed. He wants a husband and wife to live together in a promised relationship.

God doesn't like divorce because it hurts people. I don't need to explain this to you. If you know someone who's divorced, if you are divorced yourself, if your parents are divorced, you will know that nobody walks away from a broken marriage pain-free.

Now, I don't want to tack this painful and difficult subject onto the end of a sermon. I don't want to do a superficial or a surface-level study of it because that wouldn't be helpful at all.

[29 : 26] I do want to say that if you have any questions whatsoever on what Jesus teaches about marriage, divorce, and remarriage, please come and speak to Graham, myself, any of the elders after this service, and we will happily tell you what Jesus has to say in the rest of the Bible.

This is a sensitive topic, and for me to cover it properly and faithfully according to the Bible, we need a lot more time than we have this morning. But I do want to say that I believe Jesus does say in certain circumstances that divorce is allowed, and that he also goes on to speak about remarriage after divorce.

I don't want anyone walking away this morning thinking that they have failed God because of what this verse says. I don't want anyone walking away this morning thinking that God is an unsympathetic God who doesn't understand your situation.

That is not true at all. Jesus is using marriage, divorce, and remarriage as an example of how the Pharisees were misusing the law.

They weren't serving Jesus. So let me ask us this morning, who are we serving? Are we serving the law?

[30 : 41] Are we trying to work our way into the kingdom of God? Do you maybe have all the trimmings of being a follower of Jesus, but in your heart of hearts you know that you're just a fan who's standing off in the distance?

If this is you, if you wouldn't say that you're a Christian here this morning, let me remind you that God sees your heart. Let me remind you this morning that no amount of good works, no amount of moral living will make you, will make God look on you with favor.

The church is not a place where good and moral people gather. on a Sunday morning. But it is a community, a family of people who know their brokenness, of people who understand their sin and how their wrongdoings have separated them from God.

Church is a place where we gather to give thanks to our King Jesus who has taken the punishment for our sins so that we can be reconciled with God. The church is a broken but restored people.

It is a community of people who have gathered together to serve Jesus. So who are you serving this morning? Are you serving Jesus? Have you come to an understanding that only Jesus can reconcile you with God?

[32 : 03] Have you been forgiven of your wrongdoings? Then let's not do what the Pharisees did. Let's not turn our faith into a set of rules that we impose on everyone.

Let's not fall into the temptation of trying to repay God for the free gift of salvation. Instead, let us serve God with thankful hearts and an outrageous love because of who He is and what He's done for us.

Let us spend our lives living for the eternity for which we were created. Let us keep our eyes on Him because Jesus is the perfect example of what it means to serve.

We'll be singing this song in a moment. Do you think we can sing it wholeheartedly? See, this is our God, the Servant King. He calls us now to follow Him, to bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to this Servant King.

And so let us learn how to serve and in our lives enthrone Him, each other's needs to prefer because it is Christ that we are serving. So let me close this morning by asking you that question.

[33 : 19] Who are you serving this morning? Are you serving God or money? Are you serving Jesus or the law? Who are you serving?

Let's bow our heads. I'd just like us to take a few moments and ask ourselves that question. Who am I serving this morning?

Take a few moments and I will pray. Amen. O loving God and heavenly Father, we thank you for your word.

And Lord, we thank you for this question that Jesus is asking us this morning. Who are we serving? Lord, if we find ourselves this morning serving money or serving the law, help us see, Lord, that you see our hearts.

Help us see that we shouldn't be serving those things but that we should be serving you, that we should be serving your Son. And Lord, if we are serving God and we are serving Jesus, Lord, I pray that you would keep us from becoming Pharisaic in our lives.

[34 : 38] Lord, help us to see other people as brothers and sisters in Christ. Help us live a life that is glorifying to you. We ask this that your name would be lifted up above every other name on this world.

We ask this in your Son's most holy and precious name. Amen.