



LESSONS IN LIVING

“You Cannot Serve Two Masters”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Jim Rigby
August 31, 2025

Scripture Reading: Matthew 6:24 (*The Inclusive Bible*)
(Jesus is teaching) *“No one can serve two superiors. You will either hate one and love the other, or be attentive to one and despise the other. You cannot give yourself to God and Money.”*

Sermon

Thank you all for being here on Labor Day weekend. It's good to see old friends. I think it's important to remember every Labor Day that this day was invented as a distraction from May Day.

May Day was about worker justice. There was a time in the United States when unions were strong, and workers were protected. You didn't have the gig economy, where people are just out there on a limb by themselves. May Day was about solidarity.

I happen to be a democratic socialist. I don't expect that of anyone else here. But I think our answers are far outside the usual spectrum. I don't think it's left and right—I think it's up and down. As long as we ignore the working poor, as long as we can find money for medical care but not for justice, we cannot solve our problems. I can't think of a single problem America has that can be solved within the confines of capitalism.

Buckle your seatbelts—this is one of my “commie” sermons. But I hope those of you who've been here a while will remember that for 30 years, I've been saying that capitalism will implode.

Capitalism ultimately becomes fascism. That's a developmental point and it's not original to me. Vladimir Lenin said that. He also said the capitalists will sell us the rope with which we'll hang them. You only have to think of Putin to realize that when everything is for sale, the government is included. When everything is for sale, we become aliens to our own souls.

There are good aspects of capitalism, but we will not survive as a people if we don't learn to prioritize people over things. We're looking at the passage today where Jesus says...not me, not

Marx, not Lenin...*Jesus* says, “*You cannot love God and money.*” Let’s think about that if we identify ourselves as followers of this person.

I was asked on Facebook a couple of months ago, “*If Christianity is so great, why hasn’t it changed the world? Why hasn’t it saved the world?*” I’d say it’s because we’ve taken the justice piece out. Jesus didn’t talk about pie in the sky; he came to talk about human solidarity. When he identified God as a parent, that meant humankind is one family. That’s the missing piece: to realize that whatever other goods we choose, human happiness and environmental sustainability must be core values.

However wonderful capitalism was as a counterbalance to feudalism, it is still an artificial system of values. If we forget that the real value is human beings, animals, plants, and planet Earth, if we get trapped in this digital world of economics and forget that we are valuable beyond reckoning, and we let other members of our human family perish, we betray our deepest spirit as human beings.

For decades, if you Googled me and clicked “news,” the first thing that came up was “*False teacher denies the resurrection of Christ.*” And I’ll admit, I’m vain enough that it was mortifying to be a minister and have that be the first thing people saw. What I said was: I believe the resurrection is a symbol of the life process. Yes, it happened to Jesus, but it happens to all of us, whatever that means.

Now, the number one accusation is *A preacher that politics in and out of the pulpit.* I’m not crazy about that one either. But I think politics is how we treat each other. I don’t think you can teach love without thinking through what that means politically.

But what I’m talking about is ethics. What I’m talking about is our humanity. What we’re talking about is feeling the tie that binds us, not only with family and friends, but with strangers and even enemies. If we remove that humanity piece from Christianity and make it about salvation from a hell that, in my opinion, doesn’t really exist, we make people so afraid that they never think about what the world needs from them.

The first thing that jumps out at me in our text today is that you can’t have love at the center of your life and also greed. You can’t have human values at the core of your life and also property. One of them has to be foundational for the other. It doesn’t mean you can’t have some of both, but we can’t surrender responsibility for our human family to an economic system. Economic systems can’t feel. They can’t think. They can’t love us back. To surrender responsibility to *any* economic system, including socialism, including any system that you can come up with, if it replaces our human responsibility, it will make us suffer.

If you don’t believe me, think about Robert E. Lee. When I was growing up in Dallas, Texas, Robert E. Lee was something of a hero...part of the “good old days.” But when you start reading about the guy, it’s horrifying. He hated slavery, yet spent his life defending it. He betrayed his highest values...out of patriotism, loyalty, who knows what.

We can do that, too, if we surrender responsibility. If we live by artificial values, we live someone else's life. We're not looking through our own eyes. We're not feeling through our own skin.

I think every person in here would be offended if asked, "*Do you believe in slavery?*" But let me ask you this: what is the difference between slavery and poverty? Robert E. Lee thought slavery was a natural part of the universe, so there was nothing he could do about it. Some translators now, instead of calling people slaves, call people like Robert E. Lee "*enslavers.*" And that's most of the founders of this country: enslavers. Don't you think most of them would be mortified to be remembered that way?

If we think it's okay that a child born into poverty should live their whole life as a second-class citizen at best, if possession is 90% of the law, that means the poor have no rights. At best, they get 10% of their human rights, and the rich divide up the rest.

I spoke yesterday at an event I think is very important—activists and workers trying to get the state of Texas to release funds for people devastated by the floods. However, they are currently being used as political footballs. Can you imagine the trauma of losing your home, maybe losing someone in your family, and then having the state tell you there isn't enough money for you, but there's plenty for ICE?

One of my favorite statements yesterday was from someone who said, "*If there's money in Texas for razor wire, there should be money in Texas for roofs.*"

These aren't bad people. They're empty people. If you pulled most aside, they'd probably grieve a lot of this. But they've surrendered responsibility. Almost all of us have.

The last thing I want is for this to be a shaming sermon. Jesus was much more socialist than I am. He talked about giving everything away. I want my guitar. I want my laptop. Then we'll talk about universal love.

If you're a businessperson, you're no more guilty than I am. If you are police or military, you're not the problem. The problem is the system. Don't hate the player. Hate the game. A system that rewards the greediest people will end up with those people running the game. The least compassionate people will be your leaders.

If that doesn't touch you (this idea that you can't serve both God and money) then paraphrase it: you can't serve humankind and property rights. You can't have love at the foundation of your life and then trust in a competitive system to make that come true. That's the first thing I think Jesus is saying.

The second thing I hear in the passage is the use of the word *Mammon*. *You can't serve God and Mammon*. That's an Aramaic word that was translated into Greek, and it just kept getting translated. Mammon was a god of wealth. I don't think Jesus was against wealth, per se. He was against hoarding wealth. He was against some people having more than they need, while others have less than they need.

In the United States, we base many of our political ethics on the works of John Locke and Adam Smith. But both thinkers were humanists first. Adam Smith was crafting a system to counterbalance feudalism. His goal was human happiness, not amassing wealth.

John Locke's definition of property was very different. It wasn't abstract real estate or financial holdings. He believed the world belongs to all of us in common. That part gets left out. That's the socialist part of the calculation. Humankind is one family, and we have to share the Earth in some way.

You can call it anything you want. You can call it economic democracy, where people have the power to vote on what happens to them. If you don't like the word "socialist," use whatever synonym you prefer, but prioritizing people over things is a survival necessity for our species.

John Locke also believed that people belong to themselves. There's a mythology that capitalism equals freedom, but we live in a time when troops are marching in our streets. These are troops that haven't been trained in policing; they've been trained in killing. Does that sound like freedom to you?

Every woman in here has had her personhood stripped by a government that says, "Your body doesn't belong to you, at least not your uterus. That part of you is common breeding stock. The rest of you is free." What man would put up with something like that?

We have to stop staying on the sidelines. Whatever you think about abortion, that's a secondary issue. The real question is: do women belong to themselves? And what kind of freedom is it when a transgender person doesn't get to make that decision? What kind of "small government" makes that decision for you?

Capitalism does not equate with freedom. That was not the American dream. The American dream was life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all persons. There's not a person here who would apply laissez-faire capitalism to their own family. There's not a family in this building that would let their child go without lunch money because they'd exhausted their allowance. There's not a family here who, if one of their relatives came from Mexico, would put them in a detention camp or protect themselves from their brothers and sisters in the human family with razor wire.

Jesus is calling us to basic sanity. Forget Christianity. Forget theology. He's calling us to our humanity. When we look at the turmoil engulfing our world, Jesus is saying our soul doesn't have to be for sale. Can you imagine how much better you'd feel if you could look in the mirror and say, "I'm part of common humanity, and my life belongs to me, and I'm giving it on behalf of my human family"?

The last thing Jesus points out in this passage is the word *kurios*. It doesn't mean "master." It means "ultimate source." What is your ultimate source for decision-making in your life? I think that's what Jesus is asking us.

As I said before, if I get to keep my guitar and my laptop, I'm all in. That's probably not good enough, but I don't think each of us becoming poor is the answer. We don't need to help anybody by becoming destitute. We have to change the system itself.

I personally find it morally offensive when Texas lawmakers offer "thoughts and prayers" after a school shooting. I cannot think of a more blasphemous statement than the idea that God could have protected those schools but didn't because we didn't beg first, didn't grovel enough. The reason we can't get a handle on school shootings is that our lawmakers have prostituted themselves to the NRA.

We all need to reconnect with our souls. It's going to be a step at a time. It won't be easy. We'll make progress, and we'll slip back, but marching toward our common humanity is a noble life, no matter what else happens. In the end, you can feel good about your journey if you lived for your highest values.

When we ask the question, "Why hasn't Christianity saved the world?" I think it's a good question. I think the answer is that we took out the justice part. Love has to go into justice, or it's not true love. Jesus says you can't love the sacred and also the profit motive. One of them has to be central and define the other.

I saw a quote the other day for Labor Day weekend. Capitalism has told us that the American dream is becoming a mega-millionaire or billionaire. But the American dream should be collectively building a society where nobody starves or goes homeless, where everyone is treated equally, fully insured, and paid a living wage.

How does it feel when we hear "America the Beautiful," and that line comes out:

*O beautiful for patriot dream
that sees beyond the years,
Thine alabaster cities gleam,
undimmed by human tears.*

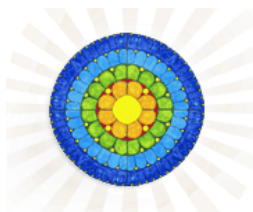
I think Jesus is trying to remind us: not a person here would inflict capitalism on their own family. No one would inflict it on their own children. So, it's high time we stop inflicting it on other people's children.

Benediction

Well, again, thank you for spending Labor Day with us. I want to repeat that my purpose in this sermon was not to make anybody feel bad about themselves. We're all a part of the system. We took offering after the sermon. *[laughter]* The answer is not for any of us to give up everything we have. It's for us to dream of a world where there's enough for everyone, and to begin working for that world today. There's so much happening in the world, and it just seems like a storm sometime. But there is a peace within every one of us, underneath that dignity, underneath that humanity that can face whatever is coming down the road. Please know as you leave here today,

whatever that love was that birthed you into being, whether it's a supernatural spirit or a cosmic process, you carry that love out of this meeting. Whatever that mysterious love that we see in Jesus and Buddha and all of the great lovers of humankind, that place inside us that calls us to our highest self, that love goes with you as well. Then finally, that mysterious love that some call the Holy Spirit, that tie that binds us with every other person, every animal, every plant, every star. That mysterious love remains with us, Go in peace,

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



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