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"GOD OR MAMMON"

(Gospel for 5th Sunday in Trinity)

By D.B. Knox

THE PROTESTANT FAITH

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Jesus said to His disciples "no man can serve two masters, you cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say to you be not anxious for your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor yet for your body what you shall put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? ....seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you....Do not be anxious about tomorrow ...."(Matthew 6:24-34)

This is a famous passage from the Sermon on the Mount. You cannot serve God and mammon, We all know what to serve mammon means, it is what most of us do most of the time - being concerned about our salary, about how to balance the budget, how to pay for this purchase or that, about a house, about retirement, about security, about promotion; our minds are filled with all these things and we are giving our energies to them. This is serving mammon, being part of the rat-race, being part of our materialistic society. Jesus said you cannot do this and serve God. At first sight this doesn't seem true. So many of us who are giving our thoughts to these material things believe at the same time that we are serving God as we get opportunity. Going to church, perhaps; saying our prayers, certainly; believing that God exists and trying to do the right thing unless it is actually to our disadvantage. We believe in God and we believe we are serving him, but Jesus said very clearly, you cannot serve God and mammon. The reason is that the God whom we think we are serving is not the true God at all; he is no more G d than Jupiter is God. The God whom Jesus is speaking about is the God revealed in the Old Testament, the God of Holy Scripture, the Creator who made the heaven and earth and everything in it; whose providence and control is over all his works. He is not the God of modern thought, no pale beginner of an evolutionary process, but the God who upholds the world and all its processes, moment by moment. He is the one



who sends the rain, who makes the sun to rise, who clothes the ground in grass, supplying food for man and beast. He is the one who has designed and willed into existence all the different forms of life and creation which we see around us.

He is the one who is in control of all the events which enter our lives. The God of infinite power and infinite humility who in His Spirit dwells in our hearts in fellowship, guiding us, encouraging us, giving us hope in His promises. He is the God who will bring all things into judgement in the Day of the Lord, who is of purer eyes than to tolerate wickedness and even now visits with judgement.

It is this God whom Jesus calls on us to serve; we cannot serve Him if our thoughts and hopes are taken up with material things. So that Jesus assumes that His hearers will choose to serve God, rather than mammon and He goes on to say "therefore I say to you, do not be anxious about your lives; what you shall eat, what you shall drink or what you shall wear..." and as we might add, where you will live, or how you will provide for your old age.

The first step and indeed the only step in serving God, is to put your faith in Him; trust the living Creator who has given you life, trust that He will give you the means that are needed to sustain it. The world around us is very beautiful and it is all created and sustained by God, "even Solomon and all his glory was not as beautiful as the flowers which bloom today but fade tomorrow, how much more will God provide for us? Little faith that we have". Jesus went on "therefore be not anxious saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear, these are the sort of things that those who do not God seek after. For your heavenly Father knows that you need these things; seek first His rule and His righteousness and you will

receive all these things as well".(Matt.6:31-33)

In serving God we serve Him by faith in Him, by hoping in Him, and by obedience to His will, gladly searching what that will might be - seeking His kingdom, that is - and doing what is right in the circumstances of life, day by day - Doing right, that is, by other people, because that is what righteousness means, the being fair to other people, the doing the thing which is right by them. This is what we are called to do if we serve God.

It sounds good - but does it work, this faith in God for the future? There is one positive value that comes from it which Jesus refers to, namely, freedom from anxiety, so many of us are nervously exhausted by worrying as to what is going to happen in the future. Jesus says, look after the problems of today and let those suffice; the future is in God's hands, in the hands of the eternal Creator. He will provide. But does this life of faith work? Most of us, think it won't and that is why we serve mammon - Not wishing not to serve God but serving mammon as well; and we finish up serving mammon only because you cannot serve the true God, the God of scripture except by complete faith in Him and full obedience to His rule or Kingdom and His righteousness and putting your whole hope in His character and promises. Does it work? Did it work for Jesus? An outsider looking on would say, most certainly not. Within a year or two of this sermon Jesus was dead, as far as the outsider could see. His trust in God didn't save Him from the injustices of the chief priests and the weakness of the Roman governor. Those who serve mammon are much wiser, they easily would have got out of the problem in which Jesus was involved, by a little bit of subterfuge or some other method. Jesus' faithfulness to doing what was right led him to a premature death, while still a young



man. But yet we know this was not all that is to be said. Jesus rose from death and is at present enjoying the pre-eminence of the Father's right hand.

Christmas is the day of Jesus' birth. Dedicate yourself to living his style of life. Serve God in faith and hope and obedience and cast all your cares on Him. For this you will need to be prayerful. Be regular in prayer. Pray for one another. Pray for your children. Pray for their true needs every day. This is the best Christmas present you can give them. For God is faithful and will hear our prayers. This life is temporal and all its values pass away. God will provide for us in it and afterwards receive us into his presence. This loving purpose he has made possible by giving his son. So serve and trust him, you cannot serve Him and mammon.

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