

# The Story of Two Bosses

by Stewart Ruch

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*The sermon teaches that we have two choices: to live by the faith system of mammon, which prioritizes acquisition and performance, or to live by the faith system of the Father God, which prioritizes receiving gifts and living by God's love.*

**Duration:** 27:49

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:19-34

**Topics:** "Christian Life"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the impact of having a good boss who was supportive and encouraging. He emphasizes the importance of seeking God's kingdom first and giving generously as an act of defiance against the false god of money. The speaker shares a story of a family in their parish who made a commitment to give to the church but struggled to fulfill it. Despite their challenges, they made a year-end gift and experienced the power and love of God. The sermon concludes with a call to renounce the influence of money in our lives and to seek personal prayer and communion for further guidance.

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## Transcript

Have you ever had a bad boss? I started my working life that way. I had a very bad boss, first boss out of college. I studied literature, which meant that I went into a field that had nothing to do with literature.

I was working for a social agency, and my first boss was actually a former Marine drill sergeant. He had found himself in a very dysfunctional, kind of cramped office, social agency situation. He sat in this windowless place day after day, chain smoking, looking for opportunity to take out all his pent-up aggression and frustration at the way life had turned out for him on young, completely naive employees like myself.

When I would see his car in the parking lot, when I would pull in, I would immediately feel an incredible sense of anxiety, dread. I worked off-site, so I would get in as fast as I could and get out as fast as I could, hoping that he wouldn't get a hold of me, saying just a few really nasty, well-developed, mocking remarks that I would deal with emotionally for the rest of the day. Bad boss.

And a bad boss, that spills over into your entire life. Your whole life takes on a kind of hue when professionally you have to be under someone like that. Fast forward four years, different workplace, good boss.

Really good boss. Saw his car in the parking lot when I would come in, and immediately I knew that he had already been thinking he was this good of how he was going to help me that day do my job better. He actually got to know me very well, was highly dialogical, was also very clear, had high expectations.

Whenever I met an expectation, he affirmed me clearly. Whenever I fell short of an expectation, he helped me understand how I could meet that expectation better the next time. He laid it out clearly.

He was thinking about me and what I needed and what would make me flourish. And I wanted to do everything I could to produce for him and to create whatever work environment I could underneath his leadership. What a difference.

What an absolute difference a great boss makes. And Jesus today talks about two bosses. Well, actually, he takes it to another level.

He talks about two masters, and he talks about the profound difference in our lives as to who we decide to live our lives under. He names the two masters God, and in your text this morning uses the word money, which is actually an unhelpful word. The actual word is mammon.

And we'll talk about mammon in just a moment. And Jesus puts forward a very stark teaching. He's preaching us toward a decision.

You cannot serve both God and mammon, choose. So the purpose of Jesus's sermon, that before we leave here today, we have become clear about which master we will serve. Which master, which spiritual entity we will put our faith in because as we will see, every person is a person of faith.

As a matter of fact, it takes an immense amount of faith to live this life. The question is not are you a person of faith? The question is exactly where are you putting your faith? Have you invested your great faith in mammon and the power of mammon? Have you invested your great faith in the Father God? As a matter of fact, what we have from Jesus this morning is essentially a kind of study in comparative religions. He's gonna lay out for us two different faith systems.

One is the faith system of mammon and one is the faith system of the Father God. And he'll clarify for us what those look like and he'll allow us, he'll give us the freedom to choose that way. So we worked through this text this morning.

First, we wanna understand mammon, the understanding of mammon, the context of mammon. Number two, we wanna compare the two faiths. You cannot serve God and mammon.

Mammon is a spiritual reality in this context. The word mammon simply is the Greek word. It's the word that the Bible, the New Testament was written in.

It actually comes from ancient languages and ancient traditions and it comes from those areas as a kind of spiritual entity, a spiritual reality. So it is far more than this. If you hear God and money and you think this, because I know many of you, you actually go, I don't have an issue with this.

I under-earned for the sake of the kingdom of God or for my family. I've chosen to live in this area. I mean, I could live somewhere else and make more money because I love this church or I love my family network or whatever it might be.

I'm not enslaved to this. But that's not what Jesus is saying. This is simply what is manipulated and what is used in a concrete way by mammon to gain our allegiance.

But he doesn't just use this. He uses many things to gain our allegiance. You may not have an issue with this, but the question is, do you have an issue with mammon? And that's what we have to get absolutely clear about.

Mammon is like a small G God and mammon has an entire faith system that's been developed in the same way that we have a capital G God and God the Father. And he too has given us a faith system by which we can live our lives. And we must get clear about the two.

One translator translates the section God and gain. I think that gets closer to what Jesus is trying to teach us by using the word mammon. I think even more clearly what we see in mammon is mammon is a spiritual reality that has to do with acquiring, with acquisition, with gain, with taking, with bringing and pulling in.

At the heart of mammon is a spiritual reality and a spiritual system by which we acquire for ourselves. Yes, we may be acquiring this, but there are many other things that we seek to acquire for ourselves under the faith system of mammon. And where have you placed your faith? Life is so fragile.

We know it's fragile. Every single person, whether they have a particular belief system or not, knows that life is fragile. It's why we buy insurance.

It's why we try to plan ahead for emergencies that might come. We know that at any moment, something can happen to our health, to our loved ones, to our finances. And we all have a sense that we just sit right here, right on the edge of fragility and challenge and trial.

The chances of life are so intense. And so because that's the case, we as human beings have wisely and astutely understood you have got to put your faith in something to get through this life. Everyone has faith.

Everyone has faith. We just have great faith in one entity and little faith in another. This is a spiritual teaching from Jesus that has profound material ramifications.

So maybe it's not just money in which you're seeking to acquire. Maybe it's security. You're thinking every possible way that you can acquire security.

Now you've realized if you've lived life for a while, this helps a lot with security. So maybe you're using this to try and get security. But the fact of the matter, you're trying to acquire a security.

You're trying to acquire order. You would like to have an ordered life by which you know what's going to happen tomorrow and the next day and the next five years. And so what you're doing is you're working your life to acquire order for yourself or for your family or for your community in some way.

Perhaps your acquisition of choice is intimacy. You are deeply desiring to acquire intimacy. It may be a sexual intimacy.

It might be a physical intimacy. It might be an emotional intimacy. But you are acquiring relationships in some capacity so you can have people around you in some way.

You can at least say that you're connected to people in some capacity. It may be that what you're trying to acquire is relief. You just want relief from the stress, the pressure, the temptations that dog you, whatever it might be.

So you're trying to acquire that relief, trying to capture that relief. When you begin to move that direction, I've got to get relief. Somehow I had to find relief.

I have to make this relief happen. You have entered into the faith system of mammon. Wherever you put your faith at that point.

Sexual fulfillment, insulation from chance. You're trying to acquire insulation. Beauty.

I don't simply mean being good looking or acquiring someone who's good looking. I mean it more deeply. You have a deep need for beauty.

You're trying to acquire that beauty. Perhaps through a home or through an apartment or through a particular way of living, through food. You're trying to acquire beauty.

You want beauty. Independence. What you want to acquire is people look at you and go, man, they're just so incredibly competent.

They don't seem to need anybody. Now because mammon's a faith system, it could be that mammon not only is your faith system or one that you're struggling with, but it could be a faith system of your family. As a matter of fact, you may have been raised up in a mammon faith.

Maybe your parents were mammon followers. Maybe your grandparents were mammon followers. It's very likely that you were raised on a daily devotional practice in your family of living by mammon and for mammon.

You regularly worshiped mammon in some capacity. Never in that explicit way. But the fact of the matter was, you were taught very clearly by your mother, by your father, by those who had mentorship over you.

You've got to find a way to acquire what you need. Because if you don't, nobody else will. And so you're brought up in this, fed on this.

For many, they were raised in the family faith system of mammon. It's very powerful. When you see people in the news do things you think sound crazy, when you hear about tragic instances, murders or robberies or scandal, what's driving that? They probably put their faith in mammon.

Let's compare the two faiths. Let me put four marks of these two faith systems in front of us and compare them. The first is, what is your life goal? If you're in the mammon faith system, your life goal is to acquire, as I said before.

Your life goal is, so you're thinking, is I need to secure, I need to acquire, I need to do it on my own. That's your life goal. If your life goal in the faith system of the Father God is yes, you need to receive.

You need to receive his gifts. As a matter of fact, we're taught that our Father knows, look at verse 32, He knows what we need and is clear on that. He actually is one who is looking for what we need and seeking to give us gifts so that we have what our lives require.

It tells us that we're to seek first the kingdom of God, the way of God and His righteousness. Define righteousness as living by the love of God. To live righteously is to live by the love of God.

So we're to seek His kingdom, live by His love and all these things will be added, they'll be given, they'll be poured out upon us. That your life goal in the Father God faith system is that you're always living by receiving gifts, which means the way that you're living is you're thinking, I don't have what I need right now, but I know it's gonna come in some capacity. I don't know how, I don't get to define it, but I'm just waiting to receive.

I actually am gaining all this energy because I'm waiting to receive as opposed to seeking to acquire. I'm actually building up these profound energy reserves, spiritual energy that you're gonna need, by the way, as we get through the faith systems. Because my life is about receiving gifts.

What might He give me now? How might He creatively solve this problem in my life? Second, life focus. If you live by the mammon faith system, your life focus, what you awaken to the thinking is, how will I perform today? The life focus in the mammon system is performance. How will I perform? Because you're acquiring and acquiring requires your performance.

You have to become very good at acquiring. Because here's the deal, everyone else who lives by the mammon system, they're also trying to acquire. So the fact of the matter is, you're in a massive competition and race.

So you have to get really, really good at it and really, really skilled at it. Because those who are really good at it, they'll acquire more. Those who aren't good at it, they'll acquire less.

So you wake up going, how am I gonna perform today? How do I need to perform? And you're always thinking about your performance. You're always thinking about what it is and how you can earn whatever your particular need and acquisition is. That's what drives your life.

You're performance driven because you are in the mammon faith system. What's the life focus in the Father God faith system? Well, it's God's creativity. In the Father God system, you're absolutely enthralled by the creativity of God.

You're stunned at how many ways and through how many different people and how creative he can be in giving you the gifts that you need to make your life work. You're always thinking about his creativity and wondering at it. Look at verse 29.

Yet I tell you, even Solomon, okay, Solomon's an ancient king, Israelite king, was one that built the temple of the Israelites for the worship of the Almighty God. Known as one of the great wonders and mysteries and beautiful edifices of the ancient world. Solomon himself was known for his own grandeur and glory.

And Jesus says, I tell you, even Solomon and all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. God wants to give you creative and beautiful gifts. You are right to yearn for beauty.

You are right to yearn for intimacy and closeness. You are absolutely wired to live by faith. The question is, which system within which you are putting these desires and these hopes and these needs and these dreams.

Be very clear about that. Because you may feel like you're tapping into your wiring when you're in the mammon system and it may immediately sort of scratch the itch that's there, but the fact of the matter is, it will lead you to a very different place than the Father God faith system. Be absolutely clear.

Because they may look awfully alike when they start out, but they will diverge. And one will lead to absolute destruction and one leads to utter holy delight. You're thinking about God's creativity.

What's the fruit? What's born out from these two different faith systems? Well, if you're doing well in the mammon faith system, then what has happened is you have been able to develop constant and regular and high praise from those around you. The fruit of the mammon system is high praise, regular praise from many different quarters, diversity of praise from men and women. Many follow you, many are tracking with you, whatever your particular way of gaining that praise might be, verbally, social media, wealth, whatever it might be.

That's the fruit. And the better you are, the more people praise you. And you have to have that in the mammon system because when you're living by performance and acquiring, you're never quite sure if you've done enough or acquired enough.

And when you've acquired that immediate need that you had, but then you had to acquire the next one and then the next one. And it just grows and grows. So you actually never have any sense of where you are in the system.

So you look for people's praise to help you know if you're doing well or not. And you build your life off of praise received, feedback given, criticism. There's an utter crisis in the mammon system.

What's the fruit in the Father God system? The fruit is that your life is full of others' needs being met. So the fruit in the Father God system is actually you become the answer to people that are also living in the Father God system's prayers. What happens is because you are seeking God's way and to live by God's love at all times, and you're trusting that he will add everything unto you because you're living your life by gifts anyway, what then happens for you is that you're freed up and you have all of this capital and energy, but you can go spend it on others who need to have their needs met.

And so God uses you to meet somebody else's need when they're the one waiting for that gift because you become the gift. And all of a sudden what happens in the Father God system is that we enter this kind of solidarity. We all need each other very, very deeply because we're all meeting each other's needs through the Father God who empowers us to do so.

And that's the fruit of our lives. Do you see how you bond deeply in the Father God faith system? But do you see how you move into competition and suspicion in the mammon faith system? Because you've got to win. You've got to win.

So the fruit, the fruit in the Father God system is you've got this and you're thinking, who can I give it to? Who do I give this to next? Who needs it the most? Or where creatively would God call me to do it? How am I part of his creative work? So you're thinking creatively about this all the time. I'll never forget, I had a chance to give a world-renowned philosopher and a Christian thinker a ride to the airport at one point. Just worked out that he needed a ride and I was available so I gave him a ride to the airport.

Well-known, famous guy. We're talking about different things. I get him there and I drop him off and I look at the seat and he had carefully folded into the seat a \$100 bill and just stuck it right there.

Just to give to me. I was a student. Just wanted to give it to me.

See, because he was thinking, how do I help other people? What's the fruit? I just, this exists to give. Do you see how defiant that is to the mammon God? When you give this? Holy defiance. The right kind of atheism.

I don't believe in you. You see that? I don't believe in you. I don't believe you're really a God, mammon.

And so I'm free with this and I'm free with my time and these clothes. I don't believe in you. I'm utterly free.

I'm the right kind of atheist. Amen? Amen, praise the Lord. That's the fruit.

What are the feelings? Feelings matter a lot, by the way. I know that feelings aren't everything and I know that, I got that. But having passed it for 20 plus years, feelings matter a lot.

So what does your life feel like when you're in the mammon system of faith? Well, according to Jesus, it feels like anxiety. It's constant anxiety. It's why he says, why are you worried? Do not be anxious.

Do not be anxious here. Because for anybody that's caught up in the mammon faith system, they live by constant anxiety because they never know if they're acquiring enough. They're competing against everybody else to acquire the right things.

What is the feeling in the father God faith system? It's closeness. That's the opposite of anxiety. The opposite of anxiety is closeness.

You feel close to God. Because see, you're wide open and you're always right here on the edge, waiting for him to give you the gift that you need to keep your life going. And you lean in like that and that brings you very close to the father God.

Because the mammon God really can't give anything. But the father, the father gave us his son and in doing so gave us closeness. And that's what marks the feelings, not all the time, but much of the time, for those who ascribe to faith in the father God faith system.

What does mammon give? It's incapable as a small g God of giving. It's incapable as a small g God of giving. And God is incapable by his character of not giving.

So how do we get free if we put our faith in mammon? And it's a process. Jesus doesn't make it binary. He makes it very clear, but he also understands other parts of his teaching.

It's a process. We have to be very clear in our decision, very clear in whom we'll put our faith. But in our life and our journey of life is constantly putting more and more faith, more and more deep faith in the father God and less and less faith, moving toward no faith in the mammon God.

Well, first we have to do, because it's such a profound spiritual reality, is to spiritually deal with it. I want to use an ancient word by renouncing the mammon God. Because the mammon God has a false God power, what the Bible would also talk about is a demonic power.

The mammon God must be renounced, not simply decided against, that's important, and not simply sort of intellectually detached from, that's important, but renounced spiritually. It takes a very clear stake in the ground, becomes a stake in the heart of the mammon God. By your renunciation.

And we're going to pray for that together. That's first. And that's critical.

Now I was studying this all week and I realized at a deeper place than ever, there is an area of my life where I am still under the mammon God's thrall. There's an area where I still am trying to acquire rather than wait for the gift of God. Because it's something that I want very, very much.

I really, really want this thing. A lot. And so I move into acquisition.

And my only way out of that is to renounce that. Secondly, very pragmatically, because money is used concretely by mammon, it can be a concrete symbol of where our hearts are, as Jesus taught, so that where our treasure is, where our heart is also, what also helps in our battle against the mammon God is to just give this stuff away. Just give it away.

Give lots of it away. Do it for the sake of the kingdom of God, first and foremost, but as you do it, you will do it for the sake of your soul. Seek his kingdom first, and by doing that, give first.

Give first. Give of your first fruits. Give of what you have first.

Give second. Give third. Make this a constant part of your life because it is utterly a defiant move against this false God.

But primarily, it's an act of joy and the power and the love of the Father God. I just heard from a family in our parish. They told me an incredible story, incredible story.

They had made a commitment of giving to resurrection before God. They just said, I want to give this much to res, and it was getting harder and harder to fulfill their commitment. They shared, and it came down to December 28th.

They wanted to make an end-of-the-year gift to the church, and literally, they sat at the kitchen table, checkbook in hand. It looked like, if you've been looking in the window, a very normal suburban scene with husband and wife with a checkbook talking to each other, but it wasn't at all normal. It was a renunciation moment.

Added to that, they knew that the husband would lose his job that afternoon. They knew it was coming, and so they had pen in hand, and they had to decide, will we or will we not write this check and give this money away? Will we or will we not put our faith in the Father or in mammon? What a profound moment of spiritual freedom when they wrote that check. Everything will be added unto us, everything.

Beauty, clothes, food, relationships, closeness, everything. So let me just lead us right now into a short time of prayer. Just want to lead you in an opportunity.

If you want to make a renunciation of mammon's influence in your life, the way in which perhaps you inherited the mammon faith system from family or from mentors or just from our culture, give us a chance to pray about that, and then also be people praying during Holy Communion, and if you want more personal prayer about this, and some of you need to get that, make sure that you receive prayer from a prayer minister and several ministers during Holy Communion, but let me just pray for us now. Just put yourself in a posture of being able to be before the Lord. However you physically get there, maybe putting your hands open in front of you, whatever might help you to be open before the Lord.

Lord, we just want to come now in confession, repentance, and Lord, in renunciation. Lord, we want to say to you today that we will not choose the way of the mammon God. We want to renounce his power in the name and by the blood of Jesus Christ.

We want to renounce the way which he influences us to think about others and our money, to think about our time and our possessions. We renounce, oh Lord, any influence he would have over our souls and our bodies. We renounce the drive to acquire by our own strength and own abilities and own ways.

We renounce the praise of men in the name of Jesus Christ. We renounce it as the fruit of our lives. Lord, we ask that now you would free us from the spiritual power of mammon.

Lord, I pray that you would free us as a church from the spiritual power of mammon. Lord, I pray that you would free the households of this community from the spiritual power of mammon. Lord, we stand in Jesus Christ.

Lord, we do not believe in the power of mammon. We name it as the false God that it is. And we ask, oh Lord, that you would now pour into us your presence.

Lord, we ask that you would pour into us the ability to wait on your gifts. Pour into us the fruit of loving and serving others' needs. Pour into us, oh Lord, the joy of celebrating your creativity.

And I pray, oh Lord, that even now we would know a closeness with your son Jesus who gave us his life on the cross. Even now bring that, oh Lord, I pray. And I thank you that your power is such that no one must remain imprisoned.

And we pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

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