

Sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity; Matthew 6:24-34

A Sermon by Martin Luther; taken from his Church Postil.

### GOD AND MAMMON. DO NOT BE ANXIOUS.

1. In this Gospel we see how God distinguishes Christians from heathen. For the Lord does not deliver these teachings to the heathen, for they could not receive them, but to his Christians. However, he does not consider those Christians, who only hear his Word, so as to learn it and be able to repeat it, as the nuns do the Psalter. In this way satan also hears the Gospel and the Word of God, yea, he knows it far better than we do, and he could preach it as well as we, if he only wanted to; but the Gospel is a doctrine that should become a living power and be put into practice; it should strengthen and comfort the people, and make them courageous and aggressive.
2. Therefore they, who only thus hear the Gospel, so that they may know it and be able to speak about the wisdom of God, are not worthy to be classed among Christians; but they, who do as the Gospel teaches, are true Christians. However, very few of these are found; we see many hearers, but all are not doers of the Gospel. We wish now to examine more closely what kind of doctrine the Lord teaches in this Gospel. First, he begins with a plain, natural example, so that we all must confess it is true; experience also teaches the same to everybody. He says: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other: or else he will hold to one, and despise the other."
3. Now he, who tries to serve two masters, will do it in a way that cannot be called serving at all; for it will certainly be as the Lord here says. One can indeed compel a servant to do a certain work against his will and he may grieve while doing it; but no one can compel him to do it cheerfully, and mean it from the bottom of his heart. He of course does the work as long as his master is present, but when he is absent, he hurrys away from his task, and does nothing well. Hence the Lord desires our service to be done out of love and cheerfully, and where it is not done thus, it is no service to him: for even people are not pleased when one does anything for them unwillingly. This is natural, and we experience daily that it is so. Now, if it be the case among human beings that no one can serve two masters, how much more is it true in the service of God, that our service cannot be divided; but it must be done unto God alone, willingly and from the heart; therefore the Lord adds: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."
4. God cannot allow us to have another Lord besides himself. He is a jealous God, as he says, and cannot suffer us to serve him and his enemy. Only mine, he says, or not at all. Behold now how beautifully Christ here introduces the example: "No man," he says, "can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." As if to say: as it is here in man's relations to his fellows, so it is

also before God.

5. We find very few, who do not sin against the Gospel. The Lord passes a severe judgment and it is terrible to hear that he should say this of us, and yet no one will confess, yea, no one will suffer it to be said that we hate and despise God and that we are his enemies. There is no one, when asked if he loves God and cleaves to him? would not reply, yes, I love God. But see how the text closes, that we all hate and despise God, and love mammon and cleave to it. But God suffers us to do this until his time; he watches the time and some day he will strike into our midst with all violence, before we can turn around. It is impossible for one, who loves gold and earthly possessions and cleaves to them, not to hate God. For God here contrasts these two as enemies to one another, and concludes, if you love and cleave to one of these two, then you must hate and despise the other. Therefore, however nicely and genteelly one lives here upon earth and cleaves to riches, it cannot be otherwise than that he must hate God; and on the other hand, whoever does not cleave to gold and worldly goods, loves God. This is certainly true.

6. But who are they that love God, and cleave not to gold and worldly possessions? Take a good look at the whole world, also the Christians, and see if they despise gold and riches. It requires an effort to hear the Gospel and to live according to it. God be praised, we have the Gospel; that no one can deny, but what do we do with it? We are concerned only about learning and knowing it, and nothing more; we think it is enough to know it, and do not care whether we ever live according to it. However, on the other hand, one is very anxious when he leaves lying in the window or in the room a dollar or two, yea, even a dime, then he worries and fears lest the money be stolen; but the same person can do without the Gospel through a whole year. And such characters still wish to be considered as Evangelical.

7. Here we see what and who we are, If we were Christians, we would despise riches and be concerned about the Gospel that we some day might live in it and prove it by our deeds. We see few such Christians; therefore we must hear the judgment that we are despisers of God and hate God for the sake of riches and worldly possessions. Alas! That is fine praise! We should be ashamed of ourselves in our inmost souls; there is no hope for us! What a fine condition we are in now! That means, I think, our names are blotted out. What spoiled children we are!

8. Now the world cannot conceal its unbelief in its coarse, outward sins, for I see it loves a dollar more than Christ; more than all the Apostles, even if they themselves were present and preached to it. I can hear the Gospel daily, but it does not profit me every day; it may indeed happen, if I have heard it a whole year, the Holy Spirit may have been given to me only one hour. Now when I enjoyed this hour I obtained not only five hundred dollars, but also the riches of the whole world; for what have I not, when I have the Gospel? I received God, who made the silver and the gold, and all that is upon the earth; for I acquired the Spirit by which I know that I will be kept by him forever; that is much more than if I had the church full of money. Examine now and see, if our heart is not a rogue, full of wickedness and unbelief. If I were a true Christian, I would say: The hour the Gospel is received, there comes to me a hundred thousand dollars, and much more. For if I possess this treasure, I have all that is in heaven and upon earth. But one must serve this treasure only, for no man can serve God and mammon. Either you must love God and hate money; or you must hate God

and love money; this and nothing more.

9. The master uses here the Hebrew, which we do not. "Mammon" means goods or riches, and such goods as one does not need, but holds as a treasure, and it is gold and possessions that one deposits as stock and storage provisions. This Christians do not do, they gather no treasures; but they ask God for their daily bread. However, others are not satisfied with this, they gather a great store upon which they may depend, in case our God should die today or tomorrow, they might then know a way out. Therefore St. Paul says, in Eph. 5, 5 and Col. 3, 5, riches and covetousness are the god of this world and are idolatry, with this Christ here agrees and calls it serving mammon.

10. Now, how does it come that the Gospel and St. Paul call especially covetousness and not other sins idolatry; since uncleanness, fornication, lust, base desires, unchastity and other vices are more opposed to God? It is done to our great shame, because gold is our god, that we serve, in that we trust and rely upon it, and it can neither sustain nor save us, yea, it can neither stand nor walk, it neither hears nor sees, it has no strength nor power, with it there is neither comfort nor help. For if one had the riches of the whole world, he would not be secure for one moment before death.

11. Of what help are his great treasures and riches to the Emperor when the hour of death arrives and he is called to die? They are a shameful, loathsome, powerless god, that cannot cure a sore, yea, it cannot keep and take care of itself, there it lies in the chest, and lets it's devotees wait, yea, one must watch it as a helpless, powerless, weak thing. The lord who has this god must watch day and night lest thieves steal it; this helpless god can aid no one. You should have contempt for this lifeless god that cannot help in the least, and is yet so scrupulous and precious; it lets its devotees wait in the grandest style and protects itself with strong chests and castles, its lord must wait and be in anxiety every hour, lest it perishes by fire or otherwise experiences some misfortune. Does this treasure or god consist in clothing, then one must be careful and on his guard against the smallest little insects, against the moth, lest they ruin or devour it.

12. The walls of our rooms should spit upon us in contempt that we trust more in the god the moth eat and the rust corrupt, than in the God, who creates and gives all things, yea, who holds in his hand heaven and earth, and all that in them is. Is it not a foolish thing on the part of the world to turn from the true God and trust in base and low mammon, in the poor, miserable god, who cannot protect himself against rust. Oh, what a disgraceful thing this is on the part of the world! God visits gold and worldly possessions with many kinds of enemies, to bring us to see and confess our unbelief and godless character, that we thus trust in a powerless and frail god, we who could at once so easily approach and cleave to the true, powerful and strong God, who gives us everything, money, goods, fruit and all we need; yet we are so foolish and make gods out of his gifts. Shame on thee, thou cursed unbelief.

13. Other sins give us a little pleasure, we receive some enjoyment from them, as in the case of eating and drinking; in unchastity one has pleasure for a little while; likewise anger satisfies its desire, and other vices more so. Only in this vice one must incessantly be in slavery, hounded and martyred, and in it no one has any pleasure or joy whatever. There the money lies on a pile and commands you to serve it; in spite of it letting any one draw from it a thimble full of wine there

comes rust and devours it, and yet he dares not attack it, lest he angers his god. And when his servants have protected their god a long time they have no more than any poor beggar. I have nothing, yet I eat and drink as heartily as any one who has a large supply of mammon. When he dies he takes just as much along with him as I do. And it is certainly the case that these people never live as well nor as richly as the poor people often do. Who arranges this thus? God, the Lord, does it. Here some have a certain affliction of the body that they have no appetite; there others are internally unsound and never relish what they eat; here their stomach is out of order; there their lungs and liver are diseased; here is this, and there is that sickness; here they are weak and afflicted at one point, there at another, and they never have an enjoyable hour to relish what they eat or drink.

14. Thus it is with those who serve this god, mammon. The true God is still of some use, he serves the people, but mammon does not, it lies quiet and lets others serve it. And for this reason the New Testament calls covetousness idolatry, since it thus desires to be served. However, to love and not to enjoy may well vex the devil. This all now experience who love the god, mammon, and serve him. Whoever has now no sense of shame and does not turn red, has a brazen face.

15. Thus now it is with the word, "serve." For it is not forbidden to have money and possessions, as we cannot get along without them. Abraham, Lot, David, Solomon and others had great possessions and much gold, and at the present day there are many wealthy persons who are pious, in spite of their riches. But it is one thing to have possessions and another to serve them; to have mammon, and to make a god out of it. Job also was wealthy, he had great possessions and was more powerful than all who lived in the East, as we read in the first part of the book of Job: yet he says, in Job 31, 24-25: "If I have made gold my hope, and said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; have I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much?"

16. The sum of all is, it is God's will that we serve not gold and riches, and that we be not overanxious for our life; but that we labour and commend our anxiety to him. Whoever possesses riches is lord of the riches. Whoever serves them, is their slave and does not possess them, but they possess him; for he dare not make use of them when he desires, and cannot serve others with them; yea, he is not bold enough to dare to touch it. However, is he lord over his riches, then they serve him, and he does not serve them; then he dare use them, as Abraham, David, Job and other rich persons, and he casts his care only upon God, as St. Paul teaches in 1 Cor. 7, 32. Hence he aids the poor with his wealth and gives to those who have nothing. When he sees a person without a coat, he says to his money: Go out, Messrs. Dollars, there is a poor, naked man, who has no coat, you must be of service to him! There lies one sick, who has no medicine. Go forth, Squires Anneberger and Joachinesthaler, you must hasten and help him! Those, who act thus with their riches, are their lords; and all true Christians surely do this. But those who save piles of money, and ever scheme to make their heap larger instead of smaller, are servants and slaves of mammon.

17. He is a lord of mammon who lays hold of and uses it for the sake of those who need it and lets God rule, who says in Luke 6, 38: Give, and it shall be given unto you; have you nothing more, you surely have me still, and I have still enough, yea, I have more than I have given away and more than can ever be given away. We see here and there many pious poor people only for the purpose that the wealthy may help and serve them with their riches. If you do it not, you have the sure proof that you

hate God. He, whom the sentence does not terrify, that he will hear on the day of judgment, can be moved by nothing. For he will hear then from God: Behold, thou hast hated me and loved that which could not protect itself against rust and moth. Ay, how firmly you will then stand!

18. Hence the sense is, we must own some possessions, but are not to cleave to them with our hearts; as Ps. 62, 10 says: "If riches increase, set not your heart thereon." We are to labour ; but we are not to be anxious about our existence. This the Master says here in our Gospel in plain and clear words, when he thus concludes: "Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on."

19. And he now uses a reasonable and natural form of speech, by which to close, that they are not to be anxious for the nourishment of their lives; for reason must conclude and yield that it is as Christ says, when he gives the ground and reason of his discourse by asking:

"Is not the life more than the food, and the body than the raiment?"

20. As if he would say: You turn it just around, the food should serve your life and not your life the food. The same is true in respect to raiment; the clothing should serve the body, thus the body serves the clothing. The world is so blind that it cannot see this.

21. Now we must here have a high esteem for the words of the Lord. He says, "Be not anxious;" he does not say, labour not. Anxiety is forbidden, but not labour ; yea, it is commanded and made obligatory upon us to labour until the sweat rolls down our faces. It is not God's pleasure for man to tramp around idly; therefore he says to Adam in Gen. 3, 19: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken." And as Ps. 104, 22-23 says: "The sun ariseth, man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening." We are not to be anxious, this is forbidden; for we have a rich God who promises us food and clothing; for he knows what we lack, before we are concerned and begin to pray.

22. Why then does he not give us what we need without our labour ? Because it is thus pleasing to him; he tells us to labour and then he gives it; not because of our work, but out of kindness and grace. This we see before our eyes; for although we labour every year in the field, yet God gives one year more than another. Therefore, we are fools, yea, we act contrary to God's will, when we are worried as to how to scrape together gold and riches, since God gratuitously and richly promises that he will give us all and will abundantly provide for our every want.

23. However, one may say: Does not St. Paul tell us to be diligent, as in Rom. 12, 8: "He that ruleth, with diligence," and there immediately follows verse 11, "In diligence, not slothful?" In like manner to the Philippians 2, 20, he says of Timothy: "For I have no man likeminded, who will care truly for your state." And Paul himself in 2 Cor. 11, 28 boasts that anxiety for all the churches presses upon him. Here you see how we are nevertheless to be anxious. Answer: Our life and a Christian character consist of two parts, of faith and of love. The first points us to God, the other to our neighbour. The first, namely faith, is not visible, God alone sees that; the other is visible, and is love, that we are to manifest to our neighbour. Now the anxiety that springs from love is

commanded, but that which accompanies faith is forbidden. If I believe that I have a God, then I cannot be anxious about my welfare; for if I know that God cares for me as a father for his child, why should I fear? Why need I to be anxious, I simply say: Art thou my Father, then I know that no evil will befall me, as Ps.16,8 says: "I have set Jehovah always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." Thus he has all things in his hand; therefore I shall want nothing, he will care for me. If I rush ahead and try to care for myself, that is always contrary to faith; therefore God forbids this kind of anxiety. But it is his pleasure to maintain the anxious care of love, that we may help others, and share our possessions and gifts with them. Am I a ruler, I am to care for my subjects; am I a father of the house, I must take care of the members of my family, and so forth, according as each one has received his gifts from God. God cares for all, and his is the care that pertains to faith. We are also to be interested in one another and this is the care of love, namely, when something is given to me, that I be diligent so that others may also receive it.

24. Here we must be guarded, lest we make a gloss, instead of understanding simply the words as they read: Be not anxious for your life. God says: labour and if you accomplish nothing, I will give what is needed; does he give then see that you rightly distribute it. Do not be anxious to get, but see to it that your domestics and others also receive of that which God has given to you, and that your domestics labour and receive a Christian training.

25. Am I a preacher, my anxiety should not be where to receive what I am to preach; for if I have nothing, I can give nothing. Christ says in Luke 21,15: "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to withstand or to gainsay." But if I have that I ought to be anxious for others to receive it from me, and that I endeavor to impart it to them in the best form possible, to teach the ignorant, to admonish and restrain those who know it, rightly to comfort the oppressed consciences, to awaken the negligent and sleepy, and put them on their guard, and the like, as St. Paul did (1 Tim. 4; 2 Tim. 3, Tit. 3) and commanded his disciples Timothy and Titus to do. My anxiety should be how others are to receive something from me; but I am to study and pray to God. Studying is my labour, this is the work he desires me to do, and when it is his pleasure he will give. It can indeed happen that I may study a long time and he gives nothing, a year or more, and when it is his pleasure, he gives as long as it is pleasing to him. Then he gives copiously and to overflowing, suddenly in an hour.

26. Thus a father of the house also does, he attends only to that which is commanded him, and lets our Lord God arrange as to how he will give. When he gives, then man is concerned how to impart it to his family, and he sees that they have no need as to the body and the soul. This is what the Lord means, when he says we are not to be anxious for our food and raiment; but he certainly requires us to labour. For thou must be a long time behind the oven until something is given to thee if thou dost not till the soil and work. True it is, God can easily nourish thee without thy work, he could easily have roasted and boiled corn and wine grow on thy table; but he does not do it, it is his will that thou shouldst labour and in doing so to use thy reason.

27. In like manner it is with preaching and all our affairs. God gives us the wool, that he grows on the sheep; but it is not at once cloth, we must labour and make it into cloth; when it is cloth, it does not at once become a coat, the tailor must first work with the cloth before it is a coat; and so God

does with all things, he cares for us, but we must toil and work. We have plenty of examples of this before our eyes, and God relates especially two here that should really make us blush with shame, namely, those of the birds and the lilies in the field. Pointing to the birds he says: "Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them."

28. As if the Lord would say: You have never yet seen a bird with a sickle, with which it harvested and gathered into barns; yea, the birds do not labour like we; and still they are nourished. By this the Lord does not however teach that we are to be idle; but he tries by this example to take all anxiety from us. For a bird cannot do the work of a farmer as we do; yet, it is not free from labour, but it does the work for which it was created, namely, it bears its young, feeds them and sings to our Lord God a little song for the privilege of doing this. Had God imposed more labour upon it, then it would have done more. Early in the morning it rises, sits upon a twig and sings a song it has learned, while it knows not where to obtain its food, and yet it is not worried as to where to get its breakfast. Later, when it is hungry, it flies away and seeks a grain of corn, where God stored one away for it, of which it never thought while singing, when it had cause enough to be anxious about its food. Ay, shame on you now, that the little birds are more pious and believing than you; they are happy and sing with joy and know not whether they have anything to eat.

29. This parable is constantly taught to our great and burning shame, that we cannot do as much as the birds. A Christian should be ashamed before a little bird that knows an art it never acquired from a teacher. When in the spring of the year, while the birds sing the most beautifully, you say to one: How canst thou sing so joyfully, thou hast not yet any grain in thy barn I It would thus mock you. It is a powerful example and should truly give offence to us and stir us to trust God more than we do. Therefore he concludes with a penetrating passage, and asks: "Are not ye of much more value than they?"

30. Is it not a great shame that the Lord makes and presents to us the birds as our teachers, that we should first learn from them? Shame on thee, thou loathsome, infamous unbelief! The birds do what they are required to do; but we not. In Genesis 1, 28 we have a command that we are to be lords over all God's creatures; and the birds are here our lords in teaching us wisdom. Away with godless unbelief! God makes us to be fools and places the birds before us, to be our teachers and rule us, in that they only point out how we serve mammon and forsake the true and faithful God. Now follows the other example of the flowers in the field, by which the Lord encourages us not to worry about our raiment; and it reads thus: "And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit unto the measure of his life? And why are ye anxious concerning raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they toil not, neither do they spin: yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God doth so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith!"

31. As if to say, your life is not yours, nor is your body, you cannot make it one cubit longer or shorter; neither be anxious as to how you are to clothe yourself. Behold the flowers of the field how they are adorned and clothed, neither do they anything to that end; they neither spin nor work, yet they are beautifully clothed.

32. By this illustration the Lord again does not wish to have us cease to sew and work, but we should labour, spin and sew, and not be overanxious and worry. The evil we have is our toil; will we in addition worry, then we do like the fools; for it is enough that each day has its own evil. It seems to me, this is disdain that is commanded, that the flowers stand there and make us blush and become our teachers. Thank you, flowers, you, who are to be devoured by the cows! God has exalted you very highly, that you become our masters and teachers. Shame, that this earth bears us! Is it an honour for us? I do not know. We must here confess that the most insignificant flower, that the cattle tread under foot, should become our teacher, are we not fine people? I think so. Now Christ places alongside of this the richest and most powerful king, Solomon, who was clothed in the most costly manner in purple and gold, whose glory was not to be compared with that of the flowers, 1 Kings 10. Is it not remarkable that the adornment of the flowers in the field should be esteemed higher than all the precious stones, gold and silver?

33. However, we are so blind that we do not see what God designs thereby and what he means. The flower stands there that we should see it, it strikes us and says: If thou hadst the adornment of the whole world even then thou wouldst not be equal to me, who stand here, and am not the least worried whence this adornment comes to me. I do not however concern myself about that, here I stand alone and do nothing and although thou art beautifully adorned, thou art still sickly and servest impotent mammon; I however am fresh and beautiful and serve the true and righteous God. Behold, what a loathsome, vicious thing is unbelief!

34. These are two fine and powerful examples of the birds and the lilies. The birds teach us a lesson as to our daily food; the flowers as to our raiment. And in the whole New Testament our shame is nowhere so disclosed and held to view, as just in this Gospel. But they are few who understand it. From these examples and parables the Lord now concludes and says: "Be not therefore anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, 'What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed.? For after all these things do the Gentiles seek; for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Be not therefore anxious for the morrow; for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

35. Now the sum of this Gospel is: Christians should not worry about what they are to eat; God provides for them before they think of their need; but they are to labour, that is commanded them. But what the kingdom of God and his righteousness are, would require too much time to discuss, you have often heard about them, if you have been attentive. This is now enough on today's Gospel. May God grant us grace that some day we may also even put it into practice! May the Gospel remain not only in our ears and on our tongues, but come into our hearts and break forth fresh into loving deeds!

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