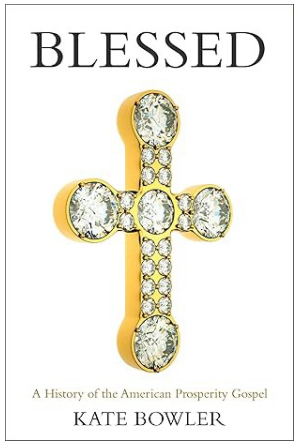
SERMON TAKE-HOME NOTES — September 21, 2025

Jesus said, "You cannot serve both God and wealth."

Do we believe this? Do we follow it? Or in this country have we been taught that we can serve multiple masters? We make our lists of whom we serve, such as: God, family, country. Don't we typically believe we can serve multiple masters at once, as long as we put God at the top of the list?

Consider family. Jesus seems to know we can easily elevate family to an idol that can get in the way of most fully serving God. Several weeks ago, for example, we read a Gospel where Jesus says, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). And earlier someone in the crowd points out Jesus' family to him, to which he responds, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it" (Luke 8:21).

Consider country. For two years now, we've been talking about the temptation of turning service to nation into an "ism," nationalism. God calls us to be prophets in the nations in which we live, able to speak out against their injustices.



God and wealth in the American Prosperity Gospel. There is a popular movement over the last 40 years that says you can not only serve both God and wealth but links them together: If you serve God faithfully, then God will reward you with wealth. Kate Bowler, author of the book we are studying on Wednesdays in the Racine Collective of Lutheran churches, tells the story in *No Cure for Being Human* about yanking books off the shelf in the hospital gift shop. They are books 'selling' the Prosperity Gospel, by pastors like Joel Osteen. It's kind of like Jesus' protest in the Temple the week of his death, where he is confronting their mixing of worship with commerce. Kate Bowler knows this because she had already protested it in her previous book *Blessed*.

Here's the bottom line: if we think we can serve both God and our systems of wealth, then we are worshiping a false God. God has throughout history sent prophets to critique our systems of wealth, because they lead to hoarding of the rich resulting in great chasms of inequality. We'll say more about this next week when Jesus follows up with the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus.

The true God which Jesus came to embody is about equality of wealth that leads to mutual flourishing. So that there *is* one pairing encouraged: ***God and neighbor***. We not only can serve both God and neighbor, but in teachings like the Parable of the Good Samaritan we learn that we serve God *through* serving our neighbor in need.

This is a lesson we can learn from even a person who has served the unjust systems of wealth, like the steward in today's parable. He is commended for being prudent for his actions. As his participation in the unjust system of wealth of his master is taken away from him, he sees the light of making friends with that some of that wealth as a means to beginning to build more faithful, trustworthy relationships with his neighbors. What can the "children of light" accomplish if we defect from the injustice of our economics? We can:

- As individuals, respond to the needs of neighbors
- As churches, undertake ministries that meet the needs of neighbors (like the Community Meal and Thread-by-Thread clothing ministry).
- What about as a nation? In a democracy, can we advocate for and vote for economic policies that lead to greater equality and mutual flourishing? Such as universal healthcare? A wider "social safety net" that meets basic needs? Investing in education and job training for everyone? How we can advocate for a more just economy that seeks mutual flourishing instead of greedy hoarding?

Recommendations for Further Inspiration

- I continue to *highly* recommend Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *The Serviceberry*, her beautiful and clear account of needing to make the journey from unjust systems of wealth to just economies of mutual flourishing.
- The movie *Jerry and Marge Go Large* – based on the true story of two groups who people who figure out a full-proof way of beating one of the 'games' in the Massachusetts lottery: a Harvard business student who uses fellow students to enhance his own wealth; and a small-town retired couple who enlist the help of neighbors for the mutual flourishing of their neighbors, benefitting the whole town.