

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Let's review what we learned about the first letter to Timothy written by Paul. Timothy worked very closely with Paul, having served with Paul in ministry. At the time this first letter was sent, he was on a mission in Ephesus, handling an assignment entrusted to him by the apostle, who had mentored him for ministry.

Last week we began with Chapter 1. This week we jump to Chapter 6. Addressing Timothy as a man of God, Paul encouraged him to pursue righteousness, godliness, faithfulness, love, patience, and gentleness. These are some of the fruit of the Spirit. Paul encouraged Timothy to fight the good fight of faith and claim the promise of eternal life.

The focus of today's reading is about Moneyed Members. Those who are rich in this present life should not be proud and trust in uncertain riches but in the living God. They should be rich in doing good works, generous, and willing to share, in order to store up for themselves treasures in heaven. Matthew wrote: *Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*

So this morning's about money.

The focus today is on the nature of true wealth – wealth that adds value and meaning to life and is not subject to the rise and fall of the stock market or the constant erosion of inflation.

Before we get to the text, let me share a story:

When Kathy and John were dating, they got to a point where they started to think about the future. Kathy invited John over for dinner one night and, after dinner, she said, “Before I could ever get serious about someone, I’d have to see a financial statement and a credit report!” She meant it.

Kathy was a banker for twenty-seven years. She’d spent a lot of those years in lending making loans, and she knew the power of money to enrich or destroy people’s lives; and, particularly; how it can wreck an otherwise happy marriage. Her main concern wasn’t in knowing how much John had, but how much he owed – and for good reason: Debt is one of the biggest problems in our society today, especially among young couples.

John took her seriously. A few days later he dropped by the house and handed her a manila folder containing a full financial disclosure and a recent credit report. He said, “You can look these over when you have time.” She went over them with a fine tooth comb. It paid off. And it removed what could’ve been a stumbling block in their relationship.

Some of the members of the church at Ephesus were affluent, or were eagerly working to improve their financial standing. Paul addressed the moneyed members in the church. He advised them to be sensible and balanced in the way they thought about wealth and in the way they dealt with it. Those with money were not to think that their wealth was evidence that they were godly, and they were warned against trying to use religion as “a way to make money.” Those with money were not to “become egotistical and not to place their hope in their finances.”

They were told to be sensible about what they possessed and to remember that “we humans didn’t bring anything into the world and so we can’t take anything out of it.” They were warned that craving wealth can become a poisoning passion that leads to “all kinds of evil,” that a fixation on financial gain can cause one to sin by an overweening pride, a consuming greed, a stingy spirit, an extravagant lifestyle, and a self-inflicted anxiety. These troubles can be avoided if, instead of selfishly craving wealth, one pursues “righteous, holy living, faithfulness, love, endurance, and gentleness, while maintaining “hope in God, who richly provides everything for our enjoyment.”

In the grand scheme of things, money – or the lack of it – looms large. You either take it seriously, or you suffer the consequences. So, what does Paul tell us about the nature of true wealth. He begins: “Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. After all, we brought

nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content."

Whether you have a little or a lot, the question is: are you content with what you have? Is it enough to suit you, or do you always want more ... a bigger house — a larger nest egg — added security, in one form or another?

A seminary student accepted his first call to a small church in North Texas. At the end of the year, he asked for a raise. Fair enough. He made a convincing case, and they increased his salary by \$2,000. At the end of the next year, he asked for another raise. This time, the chair of the finance committee put the onus on him. "How much do you think you need?" he asked. "About \$2,000," he said. They split the difference and gave him a thousand. He shared this experience with a group of pastors later and said, "You know, no matter how much I make, I figure it's always going to be about \$2,000 less than what I need."

It's human nature: We want more than we can afford. Our appetites exceed our pocketbooks. So, we rationalize: "But I need it." You convince yourself that whatever it is you want, you really need, and you need it so badly you can't live without it.

In his book, “Faith Quakes,” Leonard Sweet tells of the owner of a West Virginia country store. A salesman dropped by with what he claimed to be the hottest, best-selling product. “Everybody’s going to need one of these,” he said. The store owner wasn’t buying it. He said, “Mister, in this part of the country every want ain’t necessarily a need.”

We’ve all been there. Wants become needs, and needs become necessities of life. It’s an endless cycle. You can never have enough. Not only do you want more, you want the latest model with all the bells and whistles whether it’s cars, appliances, or iPhones.

As a result, our lives are cluttered with an endless array of gadgets and miscellaneous stuff. Still, we want more. When are you ever going to be content with what you’ve got? Harry Emerson Fosdick got it right when he prayed: “Cure Thy children’s warring madness, bend our pride to Thy control; Shame our wanton selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.”

Another way we rationalize is to compare what we have with those who have more. “I may have a modest degree of wealth,” we might say, “but it’s a drop in the bucket compared to Bill Gates or Warren Buffet.”

Isn’t it interesting that when you compare your wealth with others, it’s always those who are richer, not those who are poorer than you? Try comparing your riches to the people of Haiti or Bangladesh. You may be

a lot richer than you think.

The story is told of a little boy and his sister knocking on doors collecting anything they could to sell and make a little money. They came to the home of an old widow woman and asked if she could help them in any way.

It was a cold, blustery day, and she took pity on them. “Why don’t you come in while I see what I can find for you?” she said. She showed them into the den where there was a nice warm fire. Their little feet left puddles of water where their shoes squished out the rain. As the children warmed their little hands and feet by the fire, the woman put on some hot chocolate, then gathered up a few odds and ends for their sack.

A few minutes later, she came in with a tray of hot chocolate and cookies. The children said, “Thank you,” and sipped their hot chocolate and ate their cookies quietly on empty stomachs. Out of nowhere, the little girl looked up at the lady and said, “You must be rich.” “Rich!” she exclaimed. “Me? Rich? Why I hardly think so. Why would you say that?” The little girl said, “Your cups and saucers match.” The children finished their cookies and hot chocolate and walked back into the cold.

As they disappeared down the street, the old woman thought to herself, “My cups and saucers match. I never realized just how rich I was.”

Paul says: “For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows.”

It’s the love of money, not money itself, that’s the root of all evil. On its own, money is neutral. It’s like a bottle of whiskey on the shelf or a loaded gun in the closet – money itself won’t hurt a thing. It’s what you do with it that can kill you. If you use it wisely, it can be a blessing; if you don’t, it can be a curse. Here’s the problem: The love of money leads to idolatry. Jesus said: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You can’t serve both God and Mammon.”

The love of money leads to idolatry, and idolatry leads to death. Oh, you may live a long life, and you may have more toys than you know what to do with, but spiritually speaking, you’ll be dead in the water, searching, but never finding lasting peace, joy and happiness. What’s worse, your love of money will not only poison your life, it will infect the lives of your children and grandchildren. God told Moses: “You shall have no other gods before me ... for I am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and on the fourth generation of those who hate me ...”

No, it’s not money that’s the problem, but what you do with it – how you manage it and use it to glorify God or satisfy your own insatiable

appetites. This is why Paul admonished Timothy:

“Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.”

There are many really wealthy people in the world. Some have a lot of money. But, what made them wealthy was what they did with the money they had. For example:

- One single-handedly paid for a community-wide Thanksgiving dinner for the homeless. It ended up costing him several hundred dollars more than he'd expected. He didn't complain. He said he just wanted others to eat as well on Thanksgiving as he and his family.
- Another bought a late model used car for her niece to drive back and forth to school.
- Another helped send a young man to seminary.
- Another made payments on a customer's car when it was about to be repossessed.
- Another would get up before the crack of dawn every year the week before Christmas in order to catch the garbage truck as it came by, so he could give each of the men a crisp \$100 bill. He did the same for the mailman — and who knows how many others.

- Another gave a large gift to an elderly woman who served his grandparents in years past.
- Then there were the men who formed the “No Name Club.” They made a pact in which they told the preacher that if he came across someone in need, he could call on any one of them, and they’d give him a hundred dollars to help, no questions asked. The only stipulation was that he was not to reveal their names.

There are numerous examples of this: True wealth is measured not by how much you have, but by what you do with what you have ... by the generosity you show to others. There’s an old saying, “There’s no trailer hitch on a hearse.” You can’t take it with you. The only treasures you get to keep are those you give away.

A memorial marker honouring a man of note sparked a pastor to wonder. “What would it be like somehow to be able to look down from heaven and see what transpired in the wake of one’s death? Here’s what he saw:

- There would be the initial grief of your passing and the customary period of mourning. You’d get to hear all the nice things people would say about you.
- In a relatively short time they’d settle your estate. Hopefully, there wouldn’t any fighting or hurt feelings or disappointment that you didn’t have more to leave behind.

As time goes by and you look to see what happened to your treasures. You find that ...

- Your car was given to one of the grandchildren, who ran up a bunch of miles, then traded it in. It now sits in a junk yard being picked over for spare parts.
- Your books were donated to the public library. Most have never been checked out.
- Family pictures were boxed up and stored in the attic. Most have all but faded away.
- Your clothes were donated to Goodwill and have long since been worn out.
- Your fishing gear, including your favourite rod, reel, and tackle box, is still in a corner of the garage. It serves as a sort-of shrine for the kids to pay homage to you when they come home for the holidays. Your son-in-law got your boat and motor.
- Your knick-knacks and all those souvenirs you collected from your travels were sold in a garage sale for pennies on the dollar.

It's just a fantasy, of course. But if it were possible to look down from heaven after you're gone, I think you'd see that this life and the tangible stuff that goes with it is largely inconsequential.

It's like building a sand castle on the beach. You work for hours to build up the walls and towers and turrets, only to watch it washed away in minutes when the tide comes in.

The truth is only God is eternal. Only God is from everlasting to everlasting. Knowing God, praising God, serving God in word and deed are all that's ultimately important. In the words of Isaac Watts: "Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away; They fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day. O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, Be thou our strength while life shall last, and our eternal home."

Strive to amass a fortune. Just make sure it consists of true wealth, not the fleeting riches of this world. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. As for the stuff of this world, take Luther's advice: "Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; The body they may kill: God's truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever."

Amen.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for tis timely message on the employee-employer or slave-master relationships, heresy, and correct handling of money. We pray for wisdom to understand and apply Paul's instructions to Timothy and to our lives, as these instructions transcend time and culture. In Jesus' name **Amen**