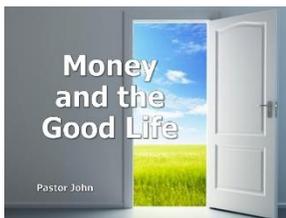


## **Money and the Good Life**

April 30, 2017

### 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6: 9-12 and 17-19

*<sup>9</sup> People who want to be rich fall into all sorts of temptations and traps. They are caught by foolish and harmful desires that drag them down and destroy them. <sup>10</sup> The love of money causes all kinds of trouble. Some people want money so much that they have given up their faith and caused themselves a lot of pain. <sup>11</sup> But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. <sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.... <sup>17</sup> Warn the rich people of this world not to be proud or to trust in wealth that is easily lost. Tell them to have faith in God, who is rich and blesses us with everything we need to enjoy life. <sup>18</sup> Instruct them to do as many good deeds as they can and to help everyone. Remind the rich to be generous and share what they have. <sup>19</sup> This will lay a solid foundation for the future, so that they will know what true life is like.*



Today we continue our "Living the Good Life" series. Last week we ended the message by posing this

question: are YOU living the good life? Over the course of this past week, I hope we have all spent time considering this question and how it applies to our lives. Last Sunday we

explored the idea that we are each created by God with a purpose in this life.

Over the course of the message, we developed the idea that true happiness, or



the good life, is found in living out God's purpose for our lives. To a degree, we all have the same general purposes. Loving God and loving neighbor and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ are the basic purposes for all Christians. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 3, Paul speaks of this common purpose. In verses eight and

nine he writes, *"The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages, according to the labor of each. For we are God's servants, working together."* Our common purpose as Christians is to



work together to build the kingdom here on earth. But each of us also have a unique and individual purpose. We all have individual gifts and talents that God has given each of us. Romans 12 speaks of the variety of gifts that we have each been given. Reading verses four through eight:

*"<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. <sup>6</sup> We have gifts that differ*



*according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; <sup>7</sup> ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; <sup>8</sup> the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness."*

This list is by no means comprehensive, but it does give us an idea of some of the ways each of us are uniquely gifted. One of the very best ways we can love God, love neighbor, and build the kingdom here is to use the gifts and talents that God has blessed each of us with. When our passions and gifts intersect with God's purpose for our lives, then we begin to truly live the good life.

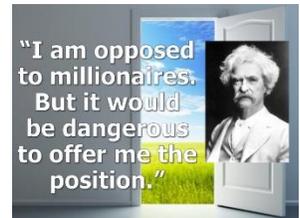


In this intersection, we find joy and contentment as we serve God. But, as we discussed last week, much can get in the way of living the good life as God intends us to live. Today, we wrestle with the primary obstacle most of us face: money.

Let us pray.



Deep down, each of us gathered here today would LOVE to live life one of two ways with regard to money. Either we would love to have so much money that money was absolutely no concern to us. Or we would like to be so free of the pull of money that it was never a part of our decision-making process. But the reality for all of us is that we mostly live somewhere between these two extremes. Mark Twain once said, "I am opposed to millionaires. But it would be dangerous to offer me the position". To me, this quote pretty accurately summarizes what we find in the Bible regarding faith and money.



In the Bible, Jesus talked about money a LOT. Sixteen of the thirty-eight or so parables were concerned with how to handle money and possessions. In the Gospels, an amazing one out of ten verses deal directly with the subject of money – that is 288 verses in all. Overall, the Bible offers 500 verses on prayer, less than 500 verses on faith, but more than 2,000 verses on money and possessions. God must have known that money and possessions would be something that mankind would struggle with.

Perhaps the best-known warning about money and possessions comes in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6, our scripture passage for today. Paul begins this section by acknowledging the great value of living a godly life. In verses six through eight, we read, *"Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these."* For Paul, he found that if his basic needs were met, then he could live the life that God intended for him to live. Last week we touched on the danger of pursuing the things of this world. These verses speak to the fact that we will take nothing with us when we die. This we know. Yet we spend much of our time acting as if we can take it with us. Paul goes on to write about the perils of such a choice: *"But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains."* This is a hard lesson for many to learn, but one that is essential to grasp before we can even try to begin to live the good life.



In Luke 12, we find an excellent illustration of how money can be the root of all kinds of evil. This parable is called "The Parable of the Rich Fool". The title says a lot, doesn't it? The parable begins with a man asking Jesus to settle a disagreement that he is having with his brother. He wants the family inheritance divided up so that he can have his share right now. Instead of being the judge or arbitrator, Jesus tells a story. Hear the story:

*"The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."*

This story deals specifically with crops, but the same could be said of money or possessions. In our area, I imagine there are one or two people who would be tempted to follow this same logic that we find in the parable. The solution to having more grain than storage space? Build more grain bins. Build bigger barns. There is a logic to this. The same principle is true for many of us in how we handle money and in how we look at our possessions. Yes, God does want to bless us and, yes, God wants us to live a comfortable life. But in this story, and often in our decisions concerning money and possessions, the question comes down to 'How much?' How much is enough? Unfortunately, often for many people, the answer is that there is never too much, so life becomes about accumulating more and more and more.

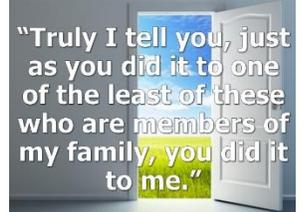


But for the rich man in our story, this is not the deeper problem. He has already accumulated much. For Jesus, the problem is what the man chooses to do with the excess and how the excess influences the man's choices about life. It never occurs to the

man that he has more than enough. The thought of blessing others with what God has blessed him with never occurs. The rich man certainly could have filled his barns with the grain and then found others who needed grain, in turn sharing God's blessings with others. The man's choice to "*relax, eat, drink, and be merry*" also certainly falls short of what Jesus expects. The man had plenty and did not need to work for more. But his newfound free time could have been put to use for the kingdom instead of him just using it for his own pleasure. He could have helped his fellow farmers. He could have volunteered to teach Sunday school. He could have gone down to the local orphanage and spent time with the children. Wealth and comfort should not get in the way of being the hands and feet of Jesus. But it so easily can. For those of us who can comfortably sit in the Lazy Boy and eat some chips while we watch our favorite TV show each night, we know this all too well.

So then, my friends, what would Jesus call us to do instead? Jesus taught that, since we are merely stewards of all that God has blessed us with, we should invest ourselves into the lives of others. He taught that we should not hoard our resources to ourselves. In the story of the sheep and the goats, found in Matthew 25, Jesus explains what we are called to do with our resources – our time, our money, our possessions. Jesus is speaking of the day of judgment, when all will stand before the throne. He has thanked and invited those who are inheriting eternal life to enter their rest. They are curious and the 'sheep' ask Jesus why they are being blessed in this way.

*37 Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 40 And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'*



We never know if we are serving Jesus or just serving someone in need. When we take the time and have the willingness to help another, we are truly investing in the kingdom of God. We know this because more often than not, when we spend time at the Thrift Store or at the Banquet in Sioux Falls or wherever it is that we are making a difference, we walk away knowing that we have been blessed far more than we have been a blessing.

This is what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 6. These blessings are our treasures. During His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shares this nugget:

*"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*



Throughout the Bible, we find story after story about money and possessions. But being generous and loving others also extends far past things we can quantify. In Luke 10 we find the Parable of Good Samaritan. In this familiar teaching, we see that being willing to take the time to help others is equally important. In the book of Ruth, we find the story of Ruth and Boaz. Here we see Boaz extending welcome and protection to a widow and her daughter-in-law. In story after story, we see example after example of what it means to fulfill our God-given purpose in life. God's purpose for you and I is not just to receive.



To find true happiness, to truly live the good life, we must be conduits of God's love and mercy and blessings. To live the good life, I believe we must first be conduits of God's love.

Once we truly know how much God loves us, our lives become about giving away that love to others. Once we truly know the reality of the free gift of God's mercy, we too begin to extend genuine mercy to others. In mercy, we offer forgiveness and compassion and empathy with no strings attached. We do so because that is how our merciful God gives us all these things to us. And once we come to understand that all we have is a blessing from God and that all we have ultimately belongs to God anyway, then we can in turn be a blessing to others in our lives. We learn to give our blessings away.

In our key verse for today, 1 Timothy 6:12, we read these words: "*Fight a good fight for the faith and claim eternal life*". Paul knew that the key to living the good life was holding true to his faith. May we all do the same. Let us pray.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) Does God really promise to provide for our necessities? What are the necessities? At what point do we cease expanding our 'needs' list?
- 2) How easy is it for you to be 'generous' with your money, time, and other "stuff" you have? What experiences or examples have helped you find the freedom to live more generously?
- 3) To what extent does your 'stuff' belong to God or to you? Is giving a favor we do to God (or the church) or is it an expression of thanksgiving?