

## 1 Timothy 6:17-21

<sup>17</sup>Instruct those who are rich in this present age not to be arrogant or to put their hope in the uncertainty of riches, but rather in God, who richly supplies us with all things for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup>Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share. <sup>19</sup>In this way they are storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. <sup>20</sup>O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, turning away from godless, empty talk and the contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge.” <sup>21</sup>By professing it, some have veered away from the faith. Grace be with you. Amen.

“Use for Good Everything God Gives”

1. Wealth is a gift of God
2. With wealth comes Christian responsibility
3. Our greatest wealth is God’s Word

Sermon for Pentecost 10, August 9, 2020; St. Paul’s Green Garden

Text: 1 Timothy 6:17-21

Theme: “Use for Good Everything God Gives”

In the name of Jesus, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What is Jesus’ attitude toward wealth and possessions? Some believe that possessions and wealth are wrong or evil because they hear Jesus say, **“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”** When people hear those words they conclude that God wants all of us to live a life that shuns material possessions. Some even believe that Jesus considered possessions to be evil. But you remember that the man who loaned Jesus his tomb was the wealthy man Joseph of Arimathea. Neither scripture nor Jesus ever give us the idea that there was anything wrong with Joseph’s wealth. Rather, we see that God is pleased when we use everything God gives for good. This is what Joseph did. Even the prophet Isaiah acknowledges this in Is. 53:9 where he predicts how Jesus would die: **“He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death.”**

So, what is Jesus’ attitude toward wealth and possessions? You may remember the rich young man who came to Jesus asking him what must I do

to inherit eternal life? Jesus told him to obey the law, honor your parents, do not murder, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not give false testimony. Do all these things, Jesus said, and you will live. The young man said, “I have kept all these commandments since I was a boy. I am not missing anything am I? Jesus said, sell all your possessions and give the profits to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven. When he heard this, the young man turned away in sorrow because he had great possessions. The implication is that this young man loved his possessions more than God. He did not see himself using his possessions for the good of others. He had forgotten, or he was never told that God is the giver of every gift. He has the right to ask us to use what he gives us for good.

So, you see, when Jesus told the parable of the rich fool, who had such a bumper crop of grain he had to tear down his barns and build bigger ones, and then believed he would prosper for a long time, God called him a fool because instead of using his possessions for God, to give glory to God, he used them selfishly, thinking it was by his own hand that he would take care of himself.

When Timothy was still a young pastor in Ephesus, Paul advised him on how to instruct the congregation to live as God wants his believers to live. In just a few words at the end of his first letter to the young pastor Paul advises him to instruct God’s people to use every gift of God for Good. He reminds the young pastor that wealth IS a gift of God; with wealth comes Christian responsibility; and our greatest wealth is God’s Word.

You notice that Paul is not telling Timothy to instruct Christians to watch out for the temptations of the world. He is pointing Christians to their own attitudes about wealth and possessions. We believers, too, need to fight against the attitudes of our sinful nature. Paul says to those who have wealth, there are two temptations a Christian can easily fall prey to; first is an attitude of arrogance. Now, let’s be very clear here; Every one of us IS wealthy by nearly every standard in the world. If you consider that the person who delivers your newspaper earns more in a year than at least 75% of the world’s population, WE are wealthy. So we each need to fight against arrogance in regard to the gifts God gives us, because everything we have IS a gift of God.

Our arrogance can take many forms. Elsewhere Paul reminds us not to consider ourselves better than anyone else. How easy it is to do that if we dare to compare our standard of living, the size of our bank account, the neighborhood or the house we live in, to those of someone else who may appear to have less. Have you found yourself judging someone else as being lazy or less intelligent or having no ambition when you compare your material possessions to theirs? Have you found yourself simply thinking that you are better than others who have less, or appear to have less? Friends, wealth in every form IS a gift of God. When we understand it that way, the attitude we will take is one of humble thankfulness for all that our God has poured into our laps. Because it all comes to us from God's blessing. I often think of Moses description of Potiphar's household while the young Joseph was the chief overseer of his property. The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian for Joseph's sake. It was God's choice how to bless both Joseph and his Egyptian master.

Another malady that can afflict us Christians in regard to material things is that we put our hope in them. Money and possessions can do a great deal of good when we use them correctly. But when we think our life in this world is secure because of the amount of money we have or that because our home is paid for we have nothing to worry about, we forget that our security is not in earthly things. Paul told Timothy, **"Instruct those who are rich in this present age not to be arrogant or to put their hope in the uncertainty of riches, but rather in God"**. God, not money or possessions will take care of us. How will money ease your conscience when it shouts at you for your arrogance and love of money? How will wealth, cure you of a terminal illness when doctors don't have a cure? The comfort we have is that the God who gives us every material blessings also gave us our Savior. When we look at our souls in the mirror and see our arrogance, our lack of love even callousness toward those who are in need, God's law smites our conscience and we know we deserve only his punishment. What a blessing that by the power of the Holy Spirit working through God's Word in our hearts we can come to him in repentance, seek his forgiveness in Jesus' righteous life and perfect death and know he forgives us completely. There is nothing left for us to do. What Paul urges us to do now is to live for our God. In regard to possessions this means wealth given by God brings Christian responsibility.

Jesus says in Luke 12, to whom much is given from him shall much be required. When God blesses us, he expects us to use the gifts he gives us in a responsible way. Since everything we have, food, clothing, possessions, family, business, job, yes, life itself are all gifts of God, how else can we use them but in a way that is pleasing to our Lord.

Paul told Timothy to remind the wealthy in the Ephesus congregation to be rich in good works. That is the God pleasing way to use the blessings God gives us. That is true whether we have a great many blessings or fewer blessings. Be rich in good works. Be rich in mercy and love and give to God and your neighbor from your heart.

And notice what Paul says about God's gift of possessions. He gives us everything for our enjoyment. Neither Jesus nor his heavenly Father command us to live a life of poverty, or discomfort or to live in such a way that our family and spouse lack food or clothing or medical care. We can enjoy every blessing from God because he gives those things for us to enjoy. After all, God created a world for us with tremendous variety in plants and animals and birds and sea creatures and landscape and climate. God did not create a lack luster earth. It is clear he created earth for us to enjoy. That means all our personal material blessings also.

One part of that enjoyment is the ability to see when we can help someone else by the proper use of our wealth, or income or possessions. Be rich in good works, be generous and willing to share Paul says. What a wonderful way to say thank you to God by giving of the bounty that he has given us by helping someone else in their time of need, or even simply as a generous gift that they can enjoy, as a gift from you or me AND as a blessing from God. And what does Paul say about such generosity? "**In this way they are storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.**" We should understand Paul correctly here. Scripture nowhere says our good works earn us a place in heaven. But good works ARE important because by doing them Christians show the love of God to others. Good works show the faith that lives in our hearts. When we give generously to others, when we support the work of our congregation, when we support a worthwhile and wholesome charity we show how thankful we are to God for his love to us. When we do good works we show that God has laid up a treasure for us in heaven through

his Son Jesus Christ. He has given us life that is truly life, a life of bliss and glory in the everlasting presence of our God.

Our works of generosity simply show that we are not worried about how many or few possessions we have. We know God has given us everything we have. We don't need to selfishly hoard or stockpile possessions as a hedge against future poverty. Rather we trust that God is in control of the future as he has been in control of the past. He is also in control of how he distributes his blessings. Whether he gives many or few we will want to be generous. And we guard against selfishness because that betrays mistrust of God; it betrays a desire to control the future rather than letting our God control it. After all, doesn't Paul remind us that God works all things for the good of those who love him? Then why would we selfishly try to control the future by selfishly hoarding what God has generously given to us? When we each find ourselves giving in to selfishness and seek God's forgiveness we also need to let our Lord show us what true wealth is. Paul reminds Timothy that our greatest wealth is God's Word.

The first century Christian church battled many doctrinal controversies. There was everything from the secret knowledge peddlers of Gnosticism to those who claimed Jesus was really only God but not man; and those who claimed he was only a man and not God. There were also those who wanted to put themselves first and take control of certain congregations. And there were the Jews who hated Christ and claimed he was an imposter and a fake Messiah. But Timothy knew the truth from Scripture as Paul would later write to him in his second letter to Timothy, **from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.** What could be more valuable? What greater wealth could our God give us? Is it any wonder Paul urged Timothy to guard that precious word of God that had been entrusted to him and to stay away from ideas and talk that takes honor away from God the Father and Jesus in order to peddle the latest false teachings of the day.

We, too, have been given the greatest wealth of all in the Word of our Lord. Staying in the word is so important for us believers today also because false teaching runs rampant in our world, in our country. Popular ideas are being peddled as truth even if it contradicts God's Word; whether it is the idea that homosexuality is just another lifestyle and deserves acceptance, or

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that a person can make a decision to believe in Jesus as his Lord and Savior apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, or the soul destroying error that sin really isn't that bad and almost everybody except the very worst criminals will go to heaven. Friends, we really need to guard God's truth and verbally correct ideas and teachings that contradict God's Word. When we do we are sharing the greatest wealth in all the world. When we speak out with God's truth, the Holy Spirit can and does work in and through the truth of God's Word. Even if you don't know it, the Spirit may use your witness to turn on the light of faith in the heart of someone who hears you.

But friends, guard this truth of God's Word because it has been entrusted to us. At the same time we can be generous with it because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. What a blessing for us to know that we really are the richest people in the world because we know who gives us every material blessing. God's material blessings to us mean we can share them liberally and generously. His spiritual blessings of his word also mean we can share them generously for the good of those we know and meet in the world. This is the way our God would have us live our lives. To his glory for the good of others.

What a blessing for us to know—we will never be poor because we always live under God's blessing, material and spiritual. The more God gives, the more we can share to use His blessings for good. Amen.