

Title: Are you truly rich?
Text: 1 Timothy 6.17-19
Theme: Taking hold of that which is truly life
Series: I Timothy
Prop Stmtnt: True riches are those you can never lose.

Christianity has had and continues to have a very conflicted view of and relationship to money. In his book, *Through the Eye of a Needle* Peter Brown examined this issue in the church from just the years 350-550 A.D. It is no coincidence that the early church's evolving view of money took place as the church's view of organization, polity, hierarchy, sacraments and the gospel itself was also evolving for the worse. Those years set the stage for much of what takes place today. Historically, the church has tried to make wealthy people feel guilty for having wealth and then turns around and promises pardon for this guilt if the wealthy will give a donation to the church, thus making the church wealthy. After all, no church ever gets greedy, right? In fact, when one person claims to have the authority to forgive sin, and offers to sell you a pardon or two (called indulgences), you can see the ugliness of this matter in full view. Selling forgiveness? Is that why Jesus died, so the church can claim to sell the ultimate gift for money?

That issue lit the fuse to the accumulating theological gunpowder that exploded 500 years ago this year in what is called The Reformation. Today, the protestant church that was established by a recovery of the gospel (and because of that protested against the Roman church), is now itself poisoned with an equally insidious version of Christianity called prosperity theology. So, I acknowledge that the church has and continues to have an inconsistent and often self-serving message when it comes to the issue of wealth. But, it doesn't have to. In fact, in this text is wonderful gospel filled wisdom that should inform, shape, perhaps correct your view of this as well as be useful for some evaluation.

Read Text:

The last two chapters of I Timothy address about every group in the church by stressing how important it is that they function like members of the church. Older men are to be treated as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers and younger women as sisters. Speaking of women, honor the widows by ensuring their needs are being addressed. Members of the church need to honor the elders. Members who are slaves need to honor their masters. Leaders need to guard their theology and conduct as a way to honor the members. The poor need to be on guard about their desire to be rich and not use leadership in the church as a means for power or money. And those who are rich also need to be on guard as well, as we see. The point is that the church is made up of people who are in different conditions in life, but who have a fundamental unity in Christ that drives how we relate to one another. If you are a widow, you need to think of how you are to use your widowhood for the gospel. If you are an elder; how you can leverage your authority for the gospel? If you are a slave, how you can leverage your position for the gospel? If you are rich, how you can leverage your wealth for the gospel?

That is the message of this text. One who is poor is not to be shamed, nor assumed to be

spiritual or not any more than one who is rich is to be envied, assumed to be spiritual, or assumed to be evil. There are widows in the church. There are elders in the church. There are slaves in the church. There are poor people in the church. There are rich people in the church. Each group has its own temptations they need to be on guard against. I love it! The church is not to be full of one demographic and one of the things that I love about these last two chapters is that it causes us to be aware of others around us and embrace them. Do you believe that? No, really, do you have good friends, who are significantly wealthier or poorer, older or younger, a different ethnicity than you? Look at your good friends in the church. How many are just like you? We need to believe this truth about the church so much that we do something about it. The rich are not to be treated any differently than anyone else in the church. They are in the world, which treats them differently which makes it a challenge to not bring that mindset into the church, but there is no special treatment that is given, nor special blame. It is as if Paul sees being wealthy for what it is. A person happens to be materially blessed by God. That makes him or her no better or no worse. What really matters is if she is a growing follower of Christ and serious member of the church family.

“As for the rich”, Paul gives a reminder, a command that has two aspects to it, followed by evidence, a result and an ultimate purpose. First, the reminder

1. **Look at your money through the lens of the gospel.** (*this present age*) (17a)

The rich in this present age are not truly rich, are they? The previous section just concluded with the wondrous hope of the return of Christ and all of the glory that comes with that event and the dawning of the age to come. That is THE day. So, if you are rich now, it is temporary at best. In fact, it might be very temporary since all earthly wealth is subject to being lost or stolen. Therefore, if you are rich, you need to recognize that you are not necessarily truly rich. Whether or not you are truly rich remains to be seen. Just because someone is rich in this life does not make them truly rich. Being rich is a curse to the rich if you trust in your riches. Do you see that? If being rich causes your heart to trust in your riches instead of trusting in God, you will go to hell. Riches cannot pay for your sin. Only Christ can do that. But, being rich does not have to be a curse, if you truly recognize that all of the money that you have in this life is like Monopoly money. It only has temporary value. It is only good for as long as the game is going, but there is coming a time when the game will be over and all of your money will be turned in.

2. **Be aware of the dangers of your money.** (first aspect of the command) (17b)

Charge them! Whoa! Hold the phone. Think about this for a second. Paul is commanding Timothy to command the people in the church who are rich. The rich aren't used to being commanded, are they? They give the commands, but not in the church, right? In the church, we are all in this together. In the church we're all under authority. And yet, this would probably be an intimidating position for Timothy. What kind of chutzpah would it take for Timothy (who probably had next to nothing) to give orders to the rich? But, he is not to be intimidated by the rich, or dismissive of them. Charge them with the implications of the gospel as it relates to their position which means be aware of the

danger that your riches place you near. Blessed is the person who blesses the church with generous gifts without demanding influence and blessed is the church that has people like that. People with money are engaged in a fight for faith because they are so tempted to believe that what they already have is all they need. If they believe that, they are placing faith in what they have instead of what Christ has done. That is damning arrogance.

A. Arrogance

Ok, think with me. What is it about money that makes it so attractive? Money makes promises. But, money makes promises it cannot keep. It makes promises that we are tempted to believe, but promises it cannot keep. One promise is: The more you have of me, the more secure you are, the happier you are, the better you are compared to others, the more important you are compared to others, or the more value you have as a person compared to others. Is that actually true? No! But we are tempted to believe it. But, what is the difference between a sinner with \$10 in his pocket and a sinner with \$1 in his pocket? About \$9. But the sinner with more money is able to purchase more coverage that can mask the real problem. The more you have, the more security you think you have. Money security is not ultimate security in Christ. It is temporary security, but it is not ultimate security, but if you have temporary security, you are tempted to believe that you have ultimate security. If you believe that; you are believing a lie. One who is arrogant is making claims that are not rightfully his or hers. You will think you have won, when you haven't actually won. (Premature celebration) (Soccer, bike, race, b-ball)

Do not be haughty because others have less than you. Do not be critical of others because you do not consider them as valuable as you. You are not across the finish line yet. The race isn't over. You may lose it all. Realize that money is not your Savior, and having money does not mean that you are safe or saved. In fact, having money will be a major source of temptation to trust in it.

B. Trusting in your riches

The only thing certain about riches is that you are guaranteed not to keep it because when you die you cannot take it with you. Now, you can send some on ahead, as we will see, but you cannot take it with you. (Story of minister - bought a suit used at a funeral home that had no pockets)

If you trust in your riches, your riches are your god and there is no way you are going to give away that which you trust in. That is why people who trust in their money tend to be so miserable and fearful. They are afraid that someone is going to come and steal their god and it is always a bad day at the office when someone steals your god. So, put your hope where it is safe and can never be taken.

3. Put your hope in God. (17c-19)

So, here is the insight. We have a heart that tells us that if we have riches, then we can be like God; that is having power, influence and comforts. However, God doesn't hoard

what he has but instead gives it away. He gives it away for the joy of others. He gives it away that the joy of others may echo his joy. God finds joy in our enjoyment. Therefore, if you really want to be like God, then don't look for ways to hoard stuff, but look for ways to be generous in order to advance the joy of others. That is the big idea of this point that we will flush out in a minute. But,

Up until this point, I've not defined what it means to be rich. Most attempts to define this end up being comparisons. The result is that I doubt that anyone in here thinks they are rich because you all know someone like Bill Gates who is really rich. In other words, being rich means having more money than you. But, I need to press on this a bit and I think I can without angst because the gospel does not play class warfare nonsense, but sees things for what they are. So, here are two things to consider:

- We are probably the wealthiest, large nation in the history of the world.

That means that those who are barely getting by are filthy rich in comparison to the vast majority of people who have ever lived. If you know where your next meal is coming from, you are rich compared to millions. If you have a roof over your head, clothes on your body, heat in dwelling, a means of refrigerating your food, running water, indoor toilets and electricity you have amazing luxuries and amenities that most kings and queens who have ever lived never dreamed of. Beyond that, many, if not most of you have motor transportation, mobile phones, internet, cable TV, prescription glasses, health insurance, urgent care centers, vaccinations, hospitals, grocery stores, and social security. Not affording a cruise is NOT being poor.

- There are those who are so wealthy, they do not have to work or do not have to work for everything.

Being so wealthy that you do not have to work is probably what it meant to be rich in Paul's day. Those who are rich do not have to work because they have the means to pay for others to do the work that otherwise they would have to do. Some of you are so wealthy you actually go to a restaurant where you pay for someone to do work you would otherwise have to do. Some of you have your nails done and hair cut. Some of you go to stores where you buy clothes you did not sew and bread that you did not make, and milk you did not get from a cow, and butter that you did not churn. In fact, we have an entire classification of people in our church who have such a steady stream of income that they do not have to work. It is called being retired. Historically, when you were so old that you could not work, your family took you in, and if you had no family, you begged. Bottom line is: We're rich! If you get social security, do not put your hope in social security, put your hope in God. If you get a pension, do not trust in your pension; trust in God. If you have savings, do not trust in your savings; trust in God. Here's why.

A. The Immediate Reason for trust (17c)

God richly provides us with everything to enjoy. Let's flush this out a bit. This world would not even exist if God did not make it. God created. Before God so loved the world

that he sent his only Son to redeem her, God so loved the world that through his Son he created her. This is his baby. He caused her to be. What kind of a God is this, who in love conceived and birthed this world? This is the God who not only owns everything because he made everything, but he richly provides us with everything to enjoy. But, what does it mean to enjoy? Is enjoyment taking what God has given and using it only for ourselves? No! Enjoyment is not being self-indulged. Enjoyment is not being made much of. Enjoyment is the humble, grateful and happy acceptance of everything in life as a gift from God for the advancement of your joy by (like God) advancing the joy of others. And the greatest way to advance the joy of others is to invest in others for the sake of the gospel. God gives you food, not just for fuel, but for your joy. God gives you strength, not just for work but for joy. God rewards your work, not just to exist, but for your joy. God gives you relationships for your joy. God gives you Himself, for your joy. Your joy is most advanced when you are enjoying God. But, the gifts are not the goal, God is. The gifts are only a means for you to enjoy God. The gifts won't satisfy you, God will. Accept the gifts as resources to invest into others for the advancement of their joy. So, if you can afford an extra vehicle, think about buying it and having it available for missionaries when they are in town, or when people in the church temporarily need a vehicle. If you have a roomy house, think of how you can house an intern. If you have extra cash, keep it with you, so that when missionaries come through, you can bless them. God enjoys the gifts he gives to you when you enjoy them as a means to share joy with others.

The fact is, the greatest gift that God has ever given is the gift of himself in the person of Christ. (gospel)

Those who truly trust in Christ trust in him supremely. When, given the choice of whether or not to trust in money or in Christ, they chose Christ. But, how do you know if you really trust Christ, if your trust is never tested? How do you know what you are if your faith never goes through the fire? Last week I talked to you about the kid raised in a Christian home who can never remember not knowing about Jesus and cannot remember a time when he or she did not believe in Jesus at some level. How can that kid really know if he or she has genuine faith? God graciously lets them face adversity, or disappointment in order for them to find out if they are for real or not. The same thing is true about the rich. Isn't that exactly what happened to Job? God graciously gave this man much wealth and Satan said, that the only reason why Job loved God was because God gave him stuff. Job was accused of not loving God for the pure worth of God, but only loving God because he got stuff from God. So, God let Satan take almost everything away. And while it was a battle, what God knew about Job was ultimately revealed. Job trusted God, no matter what. The immediate reason to trust God and not money is because God richly provides you with everything to enjoy and your hope in God is safe. So, how do you know if you trust God and not your money?

Here are 3 infinitives, 3 phrases that describe the attitude and the actions of people who are rich in this present age, but who are genuine believers.

B. The Evidence of trust in God. (18) (Here are genuine sure thing investments)

1) Doing good. (18a)

If you do not have to work for a living, then you have more time on your hands than others. How do you spend that time? Here is your challenge: Look for things to do for others and not for yourself. Look for people to disciple, to encourage, to visit, and for ways to serve. But, if you think, I'm retired, I've done my time, you are thinking like one who is self-indulgent. What are you doing for others? Seriously, turn off the Weather Channel, the Golf channel, Fox News and by ALL means TBN and do something that will matter for eternity. Ministries like MCREST should never have to ask for help. Our children's ministries should not be staffed primarily by people under 50, but over. You didn't get to this point in life to be served, but to serve. Do good! Seriously, make a plan to do good for others and schedule it, or you will waste the day.

2) Being Generous (18b)

Your life is not determined by how much you have, but by what you give away. Joy is not found in hoarding. Have you ever met a hoarder who was happy? No! When you give what you have for the joy of others that means that your joy is now being echoed in that person. In fact,

3) Being ready to share (18c)

Most of you can afford to set aside a little extra in order to be ready to share when there is a need or an opportunity to be a blessing. When a new person visits the church, think of what a blast it would be, if you came today with funds set aside, just looking for someone to take out to eat or even over to your home. Live with your eyes open and your hands open for the purpose of advancing the joy of others. Every time you invest in others like that, you are saying, "you are more valuable to me than this money. I do not trust this money, but instead trust in God who loves you and cares for you and I recognize that I am a means raised up by God to advance your joy in him. Isn't that what happens when the offering takes place? We are saying, God, I do not trust this. I trust you. Which, really is the case and perhaps you need to look at how much you really do trust God.

When you live, looking for ways to invest in that which will outlive you, it will. In fact, v.19 speaks of the result of living like this, and hoping in God.

Consider these: doing good, being generous, being ready to share (is this you?) I know many people in this church where this is so true!

C. The Result of hope in God. (19a)

Here is motivation for living generously. You will store up treasure for yourself as a good foundation for the future. This verse is simply a restatement of what Jesus said in Matthew 6.19-21, where we are told not to lay up treasures on earth where moths and rust will consume it and where thieves can break in and steal, but lay-up treasures in heaven

where they are safe. You see, God is not against investing, God is just against you wasting what he has given you on a bad investment.

Let's say that at retirement you saved \$250,000 in your IRA and between that and Social Security, you're going to be ok. You have to budget, but it will work. But, then a friend let you in on a "sure thing" investment and promised that a return of 4x would be the minimum return, and so, you decided to invest \$100,000 of your IRA, but then you thought, why not the whole thing? In fact, why not take out a loan against your home that is already paid off? After all, this would really not only make things so easy, it would provide a great nest egg for the kids and grandkids and you might even give some of it to the church. And you do. But, the entire investment goes belly up. And you not only lose your entire IRA, but now you have to spend most of your Social Security on payments for your mortgage. Instead of enjoying your retirement, now, you and your wife each have to go back to work to be able to eat. That would be pathetic.

Now, let's say that instead, the investment did pay off. In fact, let's say that it paid off 10x what you put in and now you are worth several million dollars. And so off you go. Trip to Europe, trip to Asia, trip to South America, new car, new wardrobe, golf vacations, new clubs, and a lifestyle that you could only dream about is now yours. And for the next 20 years, you are able to travel, be entertained, and "enjoy" life. Oh, you still attend church when you are in town and not recovering from jet lag, or checking on your places up north, but you cannot be expected to serve in any ministry on a regular basis since it just wouldn't be fair since you are gone so much of the time. And, at the end of 20 years, you die, one night, very comfortably, in your sleep, right after everything in your bucket list has been checked off and right after the Tigers, Pistons, Red Wings and Lions all won championships. God says, both investments were a total waste.

D. The Ultimate Purpose of hope in God. (19b)

Final clause of v.19 begins with "so that". This is the ultimate purpose. Again, this phrase "take hold of" means to make it your own. The greatest thing a rich person could ever know is the same greatest thing a poor person could ever know, or anyone could ever know. Is the gospel yours? Have you made it your own? Have you truly believed the gospel? If you have truly believed the gospel then for the rich, it will profoundly influence the way you use your resources. In fact, since you have more resources, you have significantly more accountability. The wisdom of this text is good and kind. Don't waste your life on yourself. Are you truly rich? What are you keeping? And what are you sending on ahead?