

September 29, 2013
Pentecost 19

“Treasure the Riches of Jesus’ Kingdom”

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-16

But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ which God will bring about in his own time-- God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

In the fall of the year the mice would try to get into the basement of the large farmhouse in which we lived. My mother did not like mice. She would get out the traps such as this. We put cheese on the trap or even better, peanut butter with a little bacon grease. The mouse could not resist. He wiggled his whiskers and touched the bait with his nose. The trap snapped shut and there was one less mouse to worry about in the Degner home.

We are not here this morning to learn a lesson on how to trap mice, but we are here today to learn how to fight against getting trapped by money and riches. Satan is always setting traps for people like you and me. One of his favorite baits is actually a blessing the Lord gives us. It is the blessing of money. He is good at trapping people who have large amounts of money. He is good at trapping people who have no money. He is good at trapping ordinary folks like you and me who struggle to manage our money wisely.

It won't be easy to avoid the traps that Satan sets by using money. In fact it will be a fight as Paul says, "Fight the good fight of faith." How do we win this fight? God's Word encourages us to treasure the riches of the kingdom of Christ more than the riches this world offers.

The money trap

It is not wrong to love money, but it is wrong and dangerous to value money more than the riches we have in Jesus and his kingdom. "But godliness with contentment is great gain." To be godly means that we strive to please our God and glorify him because of all the blessings he pours out to us so generously." Psalm 103 calls on his to "Praise the Lord" for all his benefits. Think of the meals you ate this week, the clothes you wear, the home

in which you live, this amazing country that is ours, the family and friends that surround you. Psalm 103 gives us the ultimate reasons to be content and happy in God's blessings. He forgives all our sins. He redeems us from the pit. He crowns our lives with love and compassion. It is not hard to go around being happy and thankful and praising God when you remember all the blessings that have been given to you.

How true it is that "we brought nothing into this world, and we can take nothing out." Think of how you were born into his world. You did not come out of your mother's womb wearing clothes or with a gold bracelet on your arms or money in your hand. Remember the words of Job which he spoke when he heard how he had lost everything including his ten children. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, may the name of the Lord be praised." At the funeral of wealthy man in Texas, one woman turned to her friend and whispered, "How much did he leave behind?" He friend whispered back to her, "I think he left it all behind." You know the saying, "You can't take it with you." It has been said that there are no pockets in shrouds and you will never see a hearse hauling a U-Haul.

You came into this world with nothing. You will leave this world with nothing. While you live on this earth a certain amount of money is going to find its way into your pockets and into your bank accounts. Some of you sitting here can remember the days when you struggled to pay your bills. You can remember days when you were at the height of your earning power. Think of all the money that passes through your hands in one lifetime here on this earth. How can I keep from loving this money more than I should?

"People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." There is nothing wrong with money and there is nothing wrong with loving money. Money is a gift from God that comes usually through hard work or gifts from people that love us or from the government. It is not wrong to want more money to provide for our needs or to help others or to give more to the church. The love for money is wrong and sinful when it becomes a root of all kinds of evil. Then it can pierce our lives with great pain and sorrow.

In our gospel for today we heard Jesus tell us a story about the rich man and poor Lazarus. The rich man was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury ever day. He wouldn't think of using his money to offer food to a poor man named Lazarus who begged at his gate. The rich man was so absorbed in what his riches could buy he had little time for God. After he died and was buried he found himself in the torments of hell. You don't have to drive to the expensive homes in Montecito to find people who value their riches more than God. Just drive through your neighborhood. People are enjoying the blessings that money gives them without honoring the God who gave them these blessings.

A young man landed a good job. The first thing he did after moving out of his parent's home was to buy a new truck. He thought he was the king of the world as he drove that new truck down the street and when he hung out with his friends. Never mind that his payments for the truck were almost as much as the rent for the room in the house he shared with friends. That was only the beginning of his problems as he started using credit cards to pay for gas, and more credit cards to buy other toys, and even more credit cards

to pay for expensive food in the restaurants. When he did go church with his mother and father, which wasn't very often, he put a dollar into the offering plate. The nasty evil root of love for money was destroying his life and even turning his heart against God. At least he did not do what one of his friends did. He had a bumper sticker on the back of his expensive car that read, "The one with the most toys wins."

Let's not just look at others and their problems with money. We need to examine ourselves. Remember when you were bitter because others had more than you did. The root of evil was there. Remember when you were jealous because your brother who was not as smart as you in school landed a better job than you did. The root of evil was there. Remember when you lost money in an investment. How angry you were! Remember when you bought a lottery ticket and actually prayed that you might win. When I take young people through premarital counseling I ask them what they think are some of the major causes of conflicts in marriages today. One of the conflicts always mentioned is money. I have known families that are hopelessly divided over the issue of money. And what shall we say about that time you had a fight in your marriage over money. Satan loves to set traps for us that involve money.

About ten years ago a small church in Georgia received the news that one of their parishioners had died and left the church 60 millions dollars worth of telephone stock. The pastor told the newspaper, "Our church has won the lottery in some respects, and the dangers are all around us." People were calling and writing letters from all over the country. A widow wanted her leaky roof repaired. A church asked for money so they could build a new sanctuary. The phone never stopped wringing. So what did the congregation decide to do with the money? Rather than risk destroying themselves as a congregation they decided to give it all away so it would not change who they were. "Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs." Satan knows how to set the traps that destroy us. Jesus gives us strength to focus on real riches, the riches of his kingdom.

The real riches

"But you man of God, flee from all of this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness." People talk about "pursuing a career." Jesus has the ultimate career for you. He has taken you out of the kingdom of darkness and brought you into the kingdom of his love. "Christ has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, not with gold and silver but with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death... that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom." Instead of joining the herd and running after money, you are members of Jesus' kingdom. You enjoy pursuing higher things in life such as righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

We are told to "fight the good fight of faith." I know it is a battle to stay away from the greed that can pop up when we have to deal with money. You have the Lord on your side. "God is our Refuge and Strength." Just as David was able to kill the giant Goliath with a smooth stone from the brook, you are able to kill the giants that attack you, including this monster of an unwholesome love for money.

We are further told to "take hold of eternal life to which you were called when you made

your confession of faith." We can witness the way Jesus did when he stood before Pontius Pilate and said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Money cannot buy me membership in God's kingdom and give me one second of eternal life. The debt of sin is far too great, including the debts that come with bad thoughts about money. Jesus offers us membership in his kingdom with his blood that was shed for us. He offers it free of charge. It allows us to live in the place he has prepared for us. The Revelation describes heaven as a place where the streets are paved with gold. It is a way of describing eternal life with Jesus as far more valuable than any money or riches in this life.

Only Jesus can keep us faithful to the end. He has riches for us that go beyond anything money can buy. He is "the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see." This King of kings and Lord of lords gives us the treasures of his kingdom, the treasures of his love in this life and for all eternity. Treasure these treasures and you will have the strength to enjoy the money the Lord gives you without letting it destroy you. Amen