

Gospel Marked: Contentment – Living Sufficiently
1 Timothy 6:6-10

“But godliness with contentment is great gain...for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”

Introduction: Often the Bible is framed in terms of **relevance**, is something written over thousands of years, thousands of years ago, *still relevant today?* It is an audacious thought, since the actual line of thinking is this: we are so much more advanced today that ancient words don't touch the modern day with its advancements, technology, and availability of knowledge. What people forget is that as much as civilizations change and globalization trends, people are still people, and the Bible addresses humanity, its heart, purpose, and responsibility to the God of the universe. These never change. It's what *Martin Luther* fought for over 500 years ago, that what is needed is ***sola scriptura***, the fact that the Bible alone is authoritative and sufficient for life and godliness.

Luke captures a story that Jesus told that would resonate today in Southern California just as much as it did 2000 years in the land of Israel. A man came to Jesus with a family squabble over money, particularly over an expected inheritance (btw, if you want to see the nastiness of the human heart, watch families try to divide up wealth after a loved one dies!). This allowed Jesus to teach on **two timeless principles**: a **warning** against covetousness, and a **wise command** about how one actually accumulates real wealth. He did this through a story. There was a wealthy landowner who's crops produced like crazy in a given year, giving him a boon of wealth. *'What to do'* with the extra he wondered? *How do I express gratitude, thankfulness, and grace for this unexpected abundance?* He created **MORE STORAGE** so he could hold onto more wealth. *Were the old storage facilities too small? Did he not have enough to live on?* NOT AT ALL! But he believed what we Americans believe: **bigger should be better, and MORE POSSESSION will certainly equal MORE HAPPINESS!** Bigger houses, newer cars, larger land masses will produce what is longing and missing in our heart. His mindset? Now, Now, what I've always wanted can take place: **Relax, check out, have some 'me' time, eat, drink, and enjoy life, checking off my bucket list!** Now we may hear that and say, "That sounds pretty good". But Jesus' response: "YOU FOOL! Tonight your life will be over, and then what will you have? What will happen to all your plans and all your possessions" (Luke 12:13-21). Jesus, as He brilliantly did, summarized His teaching this way:

*"So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not **rich toward God.**"*

This is the essence of the principle in our passage this morning. **True wealth has nothing to do with money**, and the wise person today will understand the enslaving nature of money itself. Benjamin Franklin said, *"Money has never made man happy, nor will it. There is nothing in its nature to produce happiness. The more of it one has, the more one wants."* Some of the wealthiest Americans who've ever lived attest the same thing. **John D. Rockefeller** said, *"I have made millions, but they have brought me no happiness."* And **Henry Ford** stated, *"I was happier doing mechanics work."*

This morning we want to examine our heart when it comes to **money and possessions**, with the hope that we will identify areas of misplaced love and hope, and cultivate in our heart a **true contentment** with what we have. This will then shape how we make decisions in life, and what role money plays. Money always factors in, but it should never be the driving factor. Especially as many here are contemplating moving from here (especially in light of whatever happens on Tuesday), we want to make sure we are making decisions consistent with Biblical truth and gospel motives.

Before diving in, let's do a quick survey in what the Bible says about money:

- **Money is not evil or wrong, nor is HAVING it** - Money is a gift from God's hand, by His grace, and He makes rich and poor (Deut. 9:11-18; 1 Sam. 2:7; 1 Chron. 29:12). Wealth can be a gift as well, as Biblical leaders such as Abraham, Job, and Solomon all received riches from the hand of God.
- **Money should be held with an open hand and not to be trusted** - The disciples recognized that they left all to follow Jesus (Matt. 19:27), and riches are by nature **uncertain** (Prov. 11:28). If one trusts in riches, he will fall. We have learned that lesson again and again in America, as fortunes are won and lost within days, depending on factors far beyond our control.
- **Money should not be our PRIMARY pursuit** - Our primary call is to seek first Christ and His Kingdom (Matt. 6:33), and all possessions come after that.
- **Money should be given freely** - 2 Corinthians 8-9 talks to the fact that God loves a cheerful, sacrificial, and joyful giver, giving resources to God's purposes. Money is momentary, so it should be used for eternal purposes (Luke 16:9)
- **Money should NOT affect our IDENTITY** - So often, we place the value of the person based on the strength of their financial portfolio. This is why James 2:1-10 calls out any partiality shown toward those with money. Money does not make the man. Money is like anything else given by God: *a gift to be stewarded*. That's why Jesus said in Luke 12:15, "*for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*"

The gospel changes everything in us, including who we are, what we feel, and the goal of our life. It also changes our **view of wealth**.

The issue of covetousness and contentment is an issue of our heart, so the solution to both Jesus' warning and command is a changed, soft, responsive, content heart in Christ!

A Christ-sufficient Life Produces REAL GAIN (6:6-8)

*But **godliness** with **contentment** is great gain,⁷ for we brought **nothing** into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be **content**.*

Contentment is Sourced in Godliness

To understand how godliness and contentment work together, we first must understand a bit of the **context**. Paul is correcting both false teaching and calling out false teachers in the church at Ephesus, and in the section preceding, there were those that were using **false religion driven by false teaching as a means of GAIN**. Much like today, it does not take very long to find those who profit greatly off their pseudo Biblical teaching. If you ever had a desire to vomit for the fun of it, Google the "highest earning pastors in America", and see how this is NOT a new issue. We do not believe pastors or Bible teachers should take a vow of poverty, but anyone using godliness as a means of gain has prostituted themselves for money.

But Godliness, or "Godlikeness, piety, or reverence" to God IS of GREAT gain, when it produces **contentment**. The word used here literally meant "self-sufficiency". It was a term used by philosophers of the day, the Epicureans, who used the term for someone who was living above the fray, impervious to circumstances. Paul transformed the cultural term and matched it with new life in the gospel. **True godliness produces contentment and spiritual riches**, which means contentment cannot be found apart from the gospel.

We get a profound insight into contentment from Paul's teaching in **Philippians 4:10-13**, where we gain powerful principles:

- **Contentment is something we LEARN** - "I have learned in whatever circumstance I am to be content." (11). This means that contentment is NOT natural to us but should be a growing reality in our life. You will not wake up tomorrow and be content forever, but you can wake up tomorrow with a commitment to **grow in your learning of contentment**.
- **Contentment does not mean you cannot have stuff** - "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound....of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need." Paul's life was not driven by the gaining of money or possession, so he could then take all that he had as a **gift**, whether that was little or much. **Contentment has nothing to do with how much you have!** But it has everything to do with how you view what you have. Paul never framed life in terms of **much = God's blessing and little = God's absence**. He took it all from the hand of God.
- **Contentment is truly about being Sufficient in Christ** - "*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.*" (13) Self-sufficiency is a mirage. However, when we are completely satisfied in Christ alone, we can be content with everything and anything else. Again, this is not a promise that we can DO ANYTHING, but a reality that when we are satisfied in Christ, we are no longer captive to the lie that more = better/happiness. 2 Corinthians 9:8 says it this way, "*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.*"

When we are satisfied in Christ and content with what we have, we have real wealth, and that cannot be taken away.

Contentment is Based on Reality

Paul unpacks this idea of contentment a bit more in the next two verses, each dealing with the basis of contentment. Verse 7 starts with "NOTHING", nothing did we take into this world and nothing do we take out of it. We go out like we come in, regardless of what we achieve in the middle. Now, this is a good place to remind ourselves of this reality. This does NOT mean that what we do in the middle does not matter, but it has everything to do with where we **invest in the middle**. Erin and I used to talk in our early days of marriage in terms of money and investment, which is fun when you actually have no money. We came up with **two main principles**: 1) we weren't going to let money drive our decisions, including coming to this church, 2) we wanted to invest our time in **eternal things**, which happen to be God's Word and people, particularly gospel driven relationships. Why? Because no one lays on their death bed regretting investment in those areas, nor will they regret in the eternal Kingdom. But countless have gone to death the same way they went in with nothing but financial gain to show, but without pockets to take it with them.

The Richest person in the world is the one who is content with what they have, satisfied, without the need of something else. Out of these riches they invest in the eternal, knowing that those dividends extend into all eternity.

Contentment is Defined by Enough

How much do we need to be content? *What's the bare minimum?* With food and covering, we should be content. The word "clothing" here is used generally as covering, extending to both what we wear and where we live. This is not necessarily a promise that every believer in Jesus will have these, since

Christians die of starvation or exposure like anyone else, but rather, **IF WE HAVE THESE THINGS, the rest is extra, gifts, and gravy.** Notice how this speaks to the **basics of life.** Money brings complication, doesn't it? We think that "if only I had more, life would be better" but we are betrayed every time. Contentment can function in the complex but also strives for the simple. Contentment is more interested in relationships than entertainment, worship than self-indulgent living, service over gaining more.

When we are content, satisfied, with what we have, we can receive everything for what it is-----a gift from God's hand

This principle extends beyond money and possession. If you are satisfied in Christ alone, you can stop viewing life through the lens of entitlement (I deserve more!) and covetousness (I want more!). In marriage, when you view your spouse as a gift, you no longer are looking for them to **satisfy your needs and desires**, but take everything as a gift of grace. When your spouse loves you the way you want or not (be it physical or emotional needs/desires), you are free to be satisfied in Christ. You enjoy the gifts and wait patiently when there is lack, but neither shatters your sufficiency in Christ.

Real wealth, then, is not defined by what or how much we have, but rather our satisfaction in Christ. True wealth has nothing to do with money, and everything to do with our desire for Christ.

A Misplaced Love of Money Produces REAL PAIN (6:9-10)

*But those who **desire** to be **rich** fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful **desires** that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the **love of money** is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this **craving** that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*

Desire for Wealth leads to Ruin

After establishing the positive of contentment, Paul warned against the **love of money**, the exact opposite of contentment. This echoes Matt. 6:21 which says, "*where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*" Money is a revealer of our heart, or to say more clearly, our view of money reveals our heart. But we must recognize the **dangers of money.** Most of us will not acknowledge our love of money, which means most often we are ignorant of our own heart and true desires. God does not give this warning lightly or theoretically. The love of money is common to all people, whether you have a lot or are poor, whether you admit it or not. It's a bit like *cliques* in a church. Most acknowledge they exist, but no one admits they are a part of the problem. The math does not add up.

How do we know if we have a love of money? Here are some diagnostic questions:

- Are you more concerned about making money rather than working to and for the pleasure of God? - Again, making money is not wrong, and some here are really quite good at it. But has **making money become an end in itself, rather than a result of working to the glory of God**
- **Do you ever have enough?** (Prov. 30:15) - We play all kinds of games when it comes to money and possessions, don't we? We think, "if only I had this one more thing, then I'll be happy", only to discover the happiness is fleeting. A constant desire for MORE is a trap, one that enslaves. We spend our life working to get, then to maintain, and end up working to keep what we've gained.
- **Do you define your life by WHAT you have?** We give status and value to what car we drive, or type of clothes we wear. Do you define your life by what you have?

- **Do you resent giving it away freely?** - We try to teach our girls about giving, dividing up their allowance or money earned into three jars: give, save, spend. One of my daughters told a younger sibling: *don't put the money in the "give" jar, because once you give it, you don't get it back!* When we think we deserve or are entitled to our money because WE worked for it and WE earned it, we tend to clasp on too tightly, rather than giving sacrificially.
- **Are you thankful for what you have?** A lack of thankfulness for what you have shows a covetous heart.
- **Is everything framed as a need, not just a preference or want?** - The key to understanding contentment and love of money is to differentiate between these two. It does not mean we cannot have "preferences", but if we think we NEED something to be happy, money is the love of or heart.
- **Do we spend more than we have?**
- **Do we sin to get it?** - The Pharisees of the NT loved money (Luke 16:14) and were willing to take advantage of people to get what they desired.
- **Have you forgotten God owns everything,(and will require an accounting in the end)?** - We are merely stewards of gifts God chooses to give. A love for money is a great big hole in our heart, and trying to fill that whole with MORE MONEY is like trying to satisfy our thirst by drinking salt water ----- the proposed solution only creates a bigger problem.

Desire for Wealth leads to Much Sin

Like all sin, a love for money does not stay in a box. The love of money is that root of **all kinds of evil**. Think about all the other sins that are spawned by a desire for money: *theft, murder, covetousness, lying, betrayal, sexual immorality, bribery, cheating, taking advantage of others, and showing partiality*. When Paul says that these **desires plunge us into ruin and destruction**, this is what he means.

Desire for Wealth leads to Pain

Loving and craving money results in pain, the kind that is both temporal and eternal. Some have exchanged the truth of God and salvation in Christ for their possessions, much like the rich young ruler who could not leave his life of wealth to follow Jesus. This was the heart behind Judas Iscariots betrayal of Jesus, as he was a thief his whole time with Jesus (John 12:6). Gold replaced God. The language of this verse is vivid: we are pierced with thorns, which leaves much pain, as we live with the **remorse and disillusionment of misplaced love**. Money cannot satisfy, a love of it leads to sin, and its disillusionment leaves us in pain.

So, knowing all of this, how do we evaluate moving forward? First and foremost, are we investing in the greatest gain, which is satisfaction in Christ, His promises, and sufficiency in Him? Second, are we identifying the areas of our life that are prone to the love and desire for money? The beautiful reality of life in the gospel is we are free to make choices each day consistent with truth, and those choices will be different for each of us. It means we can work, save, purchase, move, upgrade, sell, and trade to the glory of God, using all of these things to steward forth His riches for His purposes. But we are also aware with that kind of freedom comes risk and warning, knowing that our hearts easily deceive, betray, and entrap us. That's why I love the ask of Agur, the son of Jakeh (sounds like a character from the Mandelorian, but really its the writer of Proverbs 30:7-9):

*"Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die; **Remove** far from me falsehood and lying; **give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me** **Lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of the Lord."***

We want to live in absolute dependence on the Lord for all things, and want to honor Him in all that we do. The richest among us are those that learn this secret, who are truly content with anything, and who are rich toward God. May we all be able to pray this kind of prayer and desire this kind of ideal, to be satisfied in Christ so that our true desires are met in Him.