

Gospel Marked: *Stewardship: Managing Diligently*
1 Timothy 6:17-21

"They (the rich) are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share."

Introduction: The first words of a child reveal much of their heart. Words like "NO" easily are formed by our tongues, revealing our self-will and easy rebellion early on, "mommy and daddy" show our connection with and need for parents, "dog and woof woof" reminds us that dogs are better than cats, and "banana" well, I'm not sure what that says about us. But one of the first words we learn as we form concepts of boundaries is "**MINE**". Have you ever watched kids play with other kids in the nursery or at a play date? Quickly we understand that we do not naturally like people messing with our stuff and establish the idea of "ownership": its mine, you cannot have it, so don't even try. I laugh with my daughters when we drive home from school and buy Slurpees (without mom knowing), but dad doesn't buy one for himself (Dutch) but instead sips theirs liberally. We have opportunities to talk the economics of ownership as they get extremely possessive of their Cola flavored ice drink, complaining that I am drinking too much of theirs, to which I remind them that they would have NOTHING without me purchasing it for them (and let's be honest, they'd have NOTHING without us anyway). But the reality is this: ***we all struggle with seeing the things we have as "ours", rather than seeing all things that we have for what they truly are, gifts and resources given by God to steward for His glory and the good of others.***

Stewardship is not necessarily a lost concept for us, but not one that we think about that often, since we *think* in terms of long term ownership. But being a **steward** is an essential Biblical concept, one that is required for every follower of Jesus Christ. We saw last week that God is the **only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords**, which means He is the source of EVERYTHING on this earth, the giver of good gifts, from finances, personalities, abilities, and situations. **Christ** is Lord of our life, which means all things are done FOR Him, since He is our Master and we are His servants, meaning we OWN nothing but have died to ourselves, and become slaves to righteousness. A steward simply is one that manages and cares for all the resources *entrusted* to them by another, knowing that they will have to be accounted for and given back in the future.

So this morning we will strive to see ourselves rightly. We want to see ALL that we have as God's possessions given to us for a time, requiring us to use them well for His glory, particularly when it comes to two key issues: **wealth and truth**, both which are easily mishandled and thus lost for their greater purpose.

True Stewardship Requires Managing our Wealth Diligently (17-19)

*"As for the rich in this present age, **charge them** not to be haughty, nor set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches*

but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.

*They are to **do good**, to **be rich in good works**, to be **generous and ready to share**, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is **truly life**.*

To get us caught up on the context, we are reminded that Paul addressed the **love of money and desire for wealth** a few verses before. He was calling out false teachers in the church who used or leveraged *godliness* (or at least a form of it) for a covering of gaining money for themselves. The *antidote* to the destructive DESIRE for riches is to **be content in Christ**, the mindset that recognizes that in Christ, when

we have food, clothing and covering, we have all we need. This means that to maintain contentment, we must maintain a pursuit of Christ, NOT riches. Pursuing riches to fulfill our desire for riches is like quenching our thirst with salt water: it moistens the palate but eventually kills the body.

But upon "ending" the letter with a **benediction**, Paul comes back to a last point (he was a *great preacher!*), he turns to address the **actual rich** in the church. Ephesus was a metropolitan city with great wealth, so it would make sense that the church itself had a wealthy class of people making up a percentage of it. Now in addressing the rich, let's not check out, since our culture defines **rich as being the top 1%**, or those that make more than \$400,000 (and they will get taxed more now, not those who are poor who make less!). But an actual definition of **being rich** is having MORE than we need in terms of daily food, clothing, and covering. If today you had a choice of **what** to wear, **what** to eat, and slept in your own bed or room, or have rooms that don't have people sleeping in them in your home, you are considered **rich**, both historically and globally. Even those who are considered poor in our culture would be at the upper end of the wealth spectrum in most other countries. What does that mean? It means this command is being given to ALL OF US THIS MORNING, not just those that have more than you.

Stewarding Wealth Understands the Warnings against Riches:

Paul gives two main warnings when it comes to riches. Again, to be clear, being rich is NOT seen or communicated as being wrong or sinful, but **what we do with our wealth** is what's in view here.

- **Riches can far too cause us to TAKE PRIDE in our riches** - The word Paul uses means to "think lofty" of, to be haughty, or prideful. Part of our human condition is to equate wealth with status, looking at those who flaunt wealth as somehow having figured something out or people we'd want to be around. **James 2** addresses this issue when a rich man coming into the church was given a prominent seat but a poor man was pushed to the side or relegated to sitting at the feet of the others. But we can personally think the same thing, that by **making an excess of money means that our wealth means we have arrived, that we are somehow better than others**, or somehow menial tasks are beneath us. It's why in Christ we are all leveled, that there is no difference between rich and poor in the eyes of God, and that wealth can easily be an impediment in entering God's kingdom (Matthew 19:24)
- **Riches are far too uncertain to put our faith in** - We like 'rags to riches stories', but perhaps the opposite are more telling. Wealth can take a lifetime to build and moments to slip through our fingers, from changing economies, change in technology (do you remember Blockbuster video? Neither do I), or corruption (see: Madoff, Bernie). In 2008, real estate and construction tycoon Sean Quinn had a worth of \$6 billion (which if you don't know, is a LOT of money) in his native Ireland. But after the property bubble of 2008 and the nationalization of the bank that Quinn secretly owned part of (oops), his wealth was wiped out, debts had to be collected, and when all the dust settled, he and his family was left with \$15,000 (which, if you don't know, is a LOT less than \$6 billion). Riches are both uncertain in terms of **time and security**. No matter how secure our investments, or money can easily be taken away and the usefulness has a shelf life. **Proverbs 23:4-5 says, "Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven."** **Psalms 52:7 says, "See the man who would not make God His refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!"** **Riches are a resource to be leveraged for God's glory, not a commodity to trust in.** It can easily leave or be taken away, so

we must view it through the lens of opportunity to give away rather than collect more. That is Paul's point in the positive view of riches:

Stewarding Wealth Understands the Purpose of Riches

- **Our riches remind us of God's character and control** - The antidote to trusting the security of our riches is to trust on the One who both makes rich and poor (1 Sam. 2:7, Job 1:21), but also the One who allows us to enjoy the things He's created for us. Far from teaching asceticism or that living in a cave with no possessions is any more holy than owning a home, we are reminded that our Father gives good gifts to His kids (James 1:17). He gives rain and fruitful seasons, satisfying our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17). But He gives this all so that we'd enjoy **Him, being thankful** (1 Tim. 4:4) and satisfied in Him. Don't we want to do the same thing with our kids?! We don't give them only ugly socks at Christmas! We strive to give them gifts they enjoy, but NOT so they could enjoy them and forget about us, but that which would enhance the enjoyment of each other together.
- **Our riches are designed to focus on OTHERS** - Some people just know how to make money. Do you know anyone like that? I have a friend who was a Bible major in college who desired to go into ministry. He got a job with a startup company who sold promotional merchandise for companies (plush toys, key chains, little Frisbees, etc). Somehow, he turned a sales job into wealth beyond any pastor or missionary gains. Others who were hired could not duplicate his success (though many tried), but our friend turned his newfound wealth into opportunities to serve seminary students (he bought apartment buildings so young couples could live cheaply) and funded an missions organization in Africa that is still thriving today. God gifted this man money knowing that he'd use it to accomplish much for the Kingdom.

Here, Paul gives **4 present infinitives** to describe what our riches should be used for. They are general, not specific, so they encompass a wide variety of activity. 1) We are to do what is **inherently good**, always working beneficially for others. 2) We are to be **rich in good works**, letting our money work for the uplifting of the lowly or advance the mission of God's church. Like Horace VanderGelder said, "*money is like manure. It should be spread around, encouraging young things to grow*" (see Music Man for the reference). 3) We are to seek to be **generous**, which has nothing to do with amount of money and everything to do with our attitude. Generosity is acting toward others in a similar way that God acted toward us, who though "*He was rich yet for our sake became poor, so that we by His poverty might become rich.*" (2 Cor. 8:9) Generosity means we look to give bountifully, cheerfully, and liberally. 4) We are to **be ready to share**, which means generosity with our riches requires *planning so that we can be spontaneous*. No one just defaults into deep generosity, but we must **prioritize our values**, which then leads our hearts and decisions as to our giving, spending, and saving. We need to plan what we will say "yes" to and "no" to with money, deferring or denying some of our wants to be able to give to others.

Again, when we realize that our money is not really our own, that we have earned it through the gifts, resources, and opportunities God has given us, we simply view it through a lens of opportunities to bless, not trust in. It also takes a great amount of perspective, which Paul addresses next:

- **Our riches are designed to look to the future** - Any good investor knows that to truly gain wealth in this life, you must maximize deferred compensation, saying no to money NOW that will gain MORE in the future. Ironically, putting in far less money in ones 20's then in ones 30's-50's combined will pay off more. Disappointingly, most do not have earning power or do not have much excess in our 20's to invest. But here, Paul uses our investment in the present to a far greater future. He mentioned the **good foundation of the future** and **taking hold of that which is truly life**. That means that he is differentiating the time and value between the accrual of money itself versus what money can do. This is similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21:

*"Do not lay up for yourselves **treasures on earth**, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves **treasure in heaven**, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. **For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**"*

The ethic of the Kingdom of Heaven is this: **if you truly want to save, then share. If you want to store up, then give.** Jesus went on to say, *"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve God and money.**"* Does this invalidate investing our dollars, leveraging our 401k's or planning for retirement? I'd not only say "no", I'd actually say the opposite. We use all of those mechanisms not to gain security, but rather to gain opportunity to invest in what is true, real, and eternal, generous, ready to share, investing in what is good.

This helps us remember this important truth: *being a steward of riches means we recognize that **our money** is not really ours, but is a resource **entrusted to us**, not to be stored or buried, but to be used to glorify God in all things.* He will one day require us to give an account of what we used our riches on, knowing that He gave to us differently and more abundantly than the rest of the world. The question will be asked of us then: **what did we do with it? What is there to show for it? What good came from it?** It's incumbent on us to answer that question now so that we are not caught unprepared in the future.

True Stewardship Requires Guarding the Truth Entrusted (20-21)

*"O Timothy, **guard the deposit entrusted to you.** Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you."*

Paul finishes this letter, with a passionate plea to Timothy to finish what he had started, to watch over what was commanded, to **guard what was entrusted. This is the epitome of stewardship.** What was the good deposit? Nothing short of the gospel truth, the reality of special revelation that holds the hope of nations and the surpassing joy of mankind. He was to guard it with his life, knowing there was nothing more valuable nor nothing greater to invest his life into. He was to avoid pursuing false contradictions and worldly philosophies. How does he do that? He knows Scripture and the truth so well that he can see through the false things easily, discerning between what Spurgeon said, discernment not being able to point out what is true and false, but what is true and what is *mostly true*.

With stewardship comes responsibility. We'll close with the words of Jesus when He told a story about servants waiting their Master's arrival, with the ones who were ready and active receiving blessing, and those who enjoyed their possessions with no care of his return receiving wrath. He then said, **"Everyone to whom much was given of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more."** (Luke 12:48)

We have been given much, my friends. We have been given much in terms of possessions and wealth, and much will be required of us. We have been given much in terms of the rich teaching we have access to, the piles of truth we have heard, and the freedom by which we can do all of it. Are we guarding it? Are we leveraging it? Are we stewarding all things for the glory of God and the joy of all people? May that be our legacy and mark during this time, that we are found to be good stewards, ready for our Master to come and say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'