



1 Timothy 6:2-10

Great Gain

2nd Sunday after Epiphany – January 15, 2017 (am)

INTRODUCTION

Mar.10¹⁷ ... *As (Jesus) was setting out on (a) journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"* ¹⁸ *And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ¹⁹ You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.'"* ²⁰ *And he said to him, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."* ²¹ *And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."* Everyone who reads this story, especially where it appears in each of the first three (Synoptic) gospels, wants to shout out: *Take the deal! Go for it! You'll never get a better offer in life!* But that's not what happened.

Mar.10²² *Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.* And we all want to say: *No, you didn't! Can't you see what you just told Jesus?! You love your money more than Him! Go back! Take a mulligan! Tell Jesus you just lost your minds for a moment!* And this is precisely what we should be saying!

But is that the way we live our own lives? How many of us would do better than this man if we were in his place, having *great possessions*? I'd like to think I would. But even with this familiar story in mind, imagine really (*selling*) *all that (you) have, and (giving) to the poor (to) follow (Jesus)?* It's hard for us to imagine what that would even look like. It's hard to have an expensive deadline approaching and know we don't have the *money* to cover it. That's a frontal assault on our faith! Probably the only harder spiritual battle to win is when we have so much *money* available that we never face that sort of frontal assault any more. But make no mistake, this is a primary battleground for all of us—a place where our faith is tested more intensely, more subtly, more incessantly than anywhere else. And the stakes are high. I don't believe there is any spiritual struggle in the universe that poses a bigger threat.

Many have noted that *money* makes the same promises to us that God makes. And it often keeps its promises in a more predictable way than God does. You can always look at your bank account and credit limit and know how much *money* you have available. God rarely lets you

know that! Plus with *money*, you get to make your own decisions. With God, we honor His priorities, His plan. But God can keep ultimate promises. *Money* can't. God can grant *eternal life* (12). *Money* can't grant *life* of any sort, or even extend *life*. It can only make *life* here and now more opulent. But as it does that, it blinds us to the *life* that's still to come—to *that which is truly life* (19).

Paul is starting to set Timothy up for his closing exhortation to *flee these things* and *pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness* (11), toward (*fighting*) *the good fight* and (*taking*) *hold of... eternal life...* (12). And he amplifies this exhortation by opening Timothy's eyes to dangers of loving *money*. You can see it in the selfish and twisted methods of the false teachers (5). But you can also see it in the spiritually untamed affections of professing believers (10). Let's walk through this text together, then seek to hear and remember the instruction and warnings it presents. We'll do it under these two headings.

A SOLEMN CHARGE WITH SOBERING REMINDERS

Paul has just affirmed to Timothy that 5¹⁷ ... *elders who rule well* should be considered worthy of *double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching*. But it seems like the false teachers in Ephesus were bypassing what it means to *rule well*, and also what should be the proper content of their *preaching and teaching*, and instead were centering in only on the *double honor* that could be generated by *teaching*. Paul's call to Timothy was to 2 ... *teach and urge (the) things* that he'd been writing about from the beginning. As he said back in the heart of this letter: 3¹⁴ ... *I am writing these things to you so that, 15 ... you may know how you ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God...* That's the *aim* of the teaching Paul wants Timothy to *urge* on the Ephesians. He summarized it right from the start as *love that issues from a pure heart a good conscience and a sincere faith* (1:5). And as Paul (*urges*) Timothy here (3-5), he returns for a moment to the activity of those false teachers. But he does so to make a broader point about the church.

These guys were *teaching* out of their own *puffed up... conceit* (4). They were setting aside 3 ... *the sound words of the Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness*, and they were displaying their 4 ... *unhealthy craving for controversy and ... quarrels about words, which produce... 5 ... constant friction among people...* Why were they doing this? Because they were 5 ... *imagining that godliness is a means of gain*. But, what does this mean?! This list in vv.4-5 doesn't make it sound like these guys were much interested in *godliness*! If they're 5 ... *imagining that godliness is a means of gain*, then why did they have such 4 ... *an unhealthy craving for controversy and for*

quarrels about words...? Why this 5... constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth? Where's the godliness that brings gain?!

Well, that's actually not as hard to find as we might think. We just need to notice how this kind of scenario still develops in our day. The previous church I served had a radio ministry—two weekly programs and one daily. And even when you have a pretty well-known Pastor, that takes a lot of money. So, over time we had to bring in outside help to raise funds for the radio ministry, because year after year it was draining our church coffers. We interviewed only good and reputable fundraising organizations with explicit Christian convictions. But in the process we still learned some things which, in my experience, I'd never heard stated so efficiently: *You have to make people mad before they give*, said one sales representative. Or, perhaps clearer: *If you make people mad they will give more money!* We didn't contract with such companies, but from then on I've listened pretty carefully to how different Christian-based organizations raise money. And this is it, right here! You awaken anger! You play on 4...*an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words.*

Two words that are pretty important to different people for entirely different reasons can awaken *controversy* and *quarrels* pretty quickly: how about *under God* in the *Pledge of Allegiance* to our American flag? I'd love to know how much *money* has been raised by those two words. They do a pretty good job of (*producing*)... *dissension, slander, evil suspicion, and constant friction among people...* Even today, I know I'm taking a risk, quite possibly distracting some of you here who are now wondering where I stand on whether *under God* should appear in the *Pledge of Allegiance!*

But there are many more (*controversies*) like this that we can (*quarrel!*) over: how about the failing morality of Christian leaders, or perhaps the removal of prayer from public schools, or abortion—all serious subjects? You name the issue, and whoever is mad about it along with you will give you *money* if you're able to solve it—or even just promise to solve it. Now I'm not saying all Christian fundraising organizations follow this route. Again, the one we contracted didn't. But that is when I became aware that stirring up anger and *controversy* gets people to open their wallets. And if you can then promise a solution to pacify the anger you've agitated, the contents of that wallet will quite possibly become yours. And in that process, you can actually appear to be the guardian of *godliness!*

We cannot allow the meaning and nature of *godliness* to be hijacked like this. We can't allow *godliness* to be perceived as a *means* to some other end in this life. We can't allow this word, this

concept, this from-the-inside-out, gospel-transformed lifestyle to be seized by insincere people who want to twist its meaning back toward themselves to win other people's favor, and their *money*. Because that's not true *godliness*. *Godliness* is *well directed reverence—reverence of God!* Thus, *godliness* might be summarized as *being so satisfied in God, in Who He is, that we live for Him, and don't long anything else besides to Him*. We're content in Him. ⁶ (And) *godliness with contentment is great gain*. We've found the *ultimate good*, the *greatest gain*, so we don't really need anything more! We don't want anything more! 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*. We'll even be *content* without them, if necessary! We just won't live very long! But that's okay, too, Phi.¹²¹ *for to (us) to live is Christ, and to die is gain*. *Great gain!* Phi.³²⁰ ... *Our citizenship is in heaven, and (we eagerly await a Savior from [there]), (our) Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body...* when He returns! What else could we need?!

AN IMPLICIT CALL TO REMEMBER SOBERING REMINDERS

By contrast, ⁹ ... *those who desire to be rich*—those who latch on to *money*, believing it is the answer to life's problems and an *aim* worthy of our all-out pursuit—*fall into temptation, into a snare*—now, listen to the strong language Paul uses—*into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction*. This is like final judgment! ¹⁰ *For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils, of ungodliness*. *It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith, from Christ, and pierced, or impaled, themselves with many pangs!*

Some try to make us believe that the wounds incurred in the pursuit of *money* are worth it when the ship comes in. Really? *Many senseless and harmful desires, (plunged) into ruin and destruction, (impaled) with many pangs?* Sounds like a blast, eh?! Notice the contrast here: the false teachers and their *unhealthy craving for controversy* (⁴) together with the *craving* (¹⁰) of those whose *love of money* (⁹), leading them to devalue and depart from their devotion to *Jesus*—this sort of self-gratifying *craving* stands in contrast to the *contentment* of *godliness* (⁶) that is fully satisfied in God and what provides. This is the *contentment* *Jesus* provides. This is the *contentment* that is characteristic of *that which is truly life* (¹⁹).

CONCLUSION

So, what is our takeaway this morning? ⁶ ... *There is great gain in godliness with contentment*. The *contentment* that is rooted in *godliness* is like no other *contentment* in this world. It is rivaled by none. Many things in this life promise *contentment*. And most of them are pretty closely related to *money*, or pretty dependent upon *money*. But the *contentment* associated *godliness* can

enable (*slaves*) to love their (*masters*) (1-2). And if it can work there, it can work anywhere! This is the contentment that we thought we wouldn't know until heaven, breaking in to our life and experience here and now, today, by the grace of God.

Paul spoke of this grace to Titus: *21 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works—a people (content), and contagious, in godliness.*

This is a *contentment* rooted in promises that make *money* a peripheral challenge at best. The writer of Hebrews understood this issue: *13s Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for (God) has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."* It's God, not *money*, Who provides for us. It is He Who will never leave us, never fail us. Remember *the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and (His) teaching that accords with godliness* from the *Sermon on the Mount*? Speaking of the basic needs of life—food and drink and clothing—He said: *Mat.6:33 ... Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.* We can be (*content*) in *godliness*, for God is with us, meeting the needs that we think only *money* can solve.

A friend of mine, Michael, made a large amount of money early in his life and, as a result, followed *Jesus* into local church ministry in his late thirties. He was set up for life, financially speaking. And he lived a modest enough lifestyle that he could easily make it on a ministry income. Then came the crash of 2008. He was heavily invested in technology stocks, which really took a hit at that time, and he lost virtually all of his future financial security. As he was telling me the story I kept expecting him to say: *And then the market reversed and I made it all back, and more!* But that never happened! I remember asking him: *How are you talking about this so calmly when you lost everything that made your transition into ministry seem doable?* He looked at me with a chuckle and said: *It's only money.* He had eluded the *snare*—avoided *piercing himself with many pangs!* (10) He'd (*kept his*) *life free from love of money* (Heb.13:5). This is a brother who understood *godliness with contentment!*

This is the perspective that can be ours this morning as well, by the same grace of God that accomplished this work in Michael's life. It can be ours because the joy and *contentment* of heaven has already broken in to the present age with the coming of *our Lord Jesus Christ*, and

the sacrifice He offered for the sins of all who believe! When we receive Him by faith, we are cleansed of the guilt of our sins and reconciled to God in Him. And we receive His Holy Spirit, not only as a promise guaranteeing our eternal future with Him in heaven, but giving us a foretaste of that life here and now. Paul reminds us of that life in today's text as he speaks of our leaving this *world* (7). And that's not something we need to fear if we've tasted of the 12... *grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* with which Paul greeted Timothy as this letter began.

This is something we should remember as we come to the Table of the Lord. No small part of our worship here is rooted in the understanding that the Sacrifice we remember today enables fallen, selfish people like you and me to know, actually know, the *great gain of contentment in godliness!* Praise God! And let's now remember our Lord's death in Communion.