

HIGHLY VALUED - GODLINESS WITH CONTENTMENT
A SERMON BASED ON 1 TIMOTHY 6:3-21
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO
SUNDAY, MAY 19, 2019
10:00 a.m.

What we heard this morning was part of a letter

the apostle Paul wrote to his protege Timothy.

Paul had left Timothy in ancient city of Ephesus.

You can visit its ruins in modern day Turkey.

All the Mediterranean cruises will take you there.

Because of movies and Sunday School lessons

we can tend to think of Bible places as little rural villages,

and to be fair, that's where Jesus spent a lot of his time.

But Paul left Timothy to look after the group of people

that were the Christian church in the very large city of Ephesus.

Paul left Timothy not in some small village,

he left Timothy in the ancient world's Manhattan.

And well, you know what city people are like.

They are cosmopolitan.

They are sophisticated.

They know where to find authentic Thai and Indian food.

They have memberships at the museums,

and know who the latest exhibit is by at the art gallery.

They will die trying to find a way to tell you,

without looking like they are showing off that

they actually picked up one of her pieces before anyone

knew who she was.

Because you know, good taste and all.

You know what city people are like.

They know what's in fashion,

how to dress,

what to drive.

They listen to CBC, BBC and NPR and not only know

what those letters stand for,

but appreciate the eclectic interviews

and wide ranging topics

that make for good dinner conversation.

They know what neighbourhood you should live in.

What car will earn you respect.

What health club membership will get you networked.

In short, they know valuable things.

That's who Timothy was leading in Christian discipleship.

People who believed they knew what the valuable things were.

Today we read Timothy's mail and saw what Paul wrote to him.

Timothy, makes sure that they have their values in the right order.

“If anyone teaches false doctrine

and doesn't agree to the sound instruction

of our Lord Jesus Christ

and to godly teaching,

they are conceited and understand nothing.

They have an unhealthy interest in controversies

and quarrels about words

quarrels that result in envy, strife, malicious talk

evil suspicions and constant friction

between people of a corrupt mind
who've been robbed of the truth,

Who says the Bible is irrelevant,

that feels like every day on social media or in the
comments section below the article.

They think godliness is a means to financial gain.

They are people who think godliness,

a life lived according to Jesus' teaching

a life of sound instruction

is a means, a leverage point, a way to get,

a way to

financial gain.

Godliness as a means to financial gain.

It sounds ridiculous.

But if you pause for a moment,

it's not that far from our own hearts.

We are at risk of making our God

what I call the vending machine God.

Put in all the stuff God tells you to do,
make sure you have the right amount of faith,
do right by others and
God will bless you.

Live in this particular way, punch in these numbers
and you will have the combination
to unlock the safe of God's treasures.
It's a false teaching.

It shows up when we believe God has broken the deal.

I put in,
you didn't deliver.

Paul was reminding Timothy,

Make sure they are getting the values in the right order.

Some of your city people types,
those ones who think
they have the handle on what is valuable,
well they are argumentative,
they love nothing better than stirring up interpersonal conflict,

they have an addiction to drama

and get this,

they think that godliness is just a means to an end.

They think the end,

the goal.

Is financial gain.

God's blessing.

God's promise.

God's safety deposit box.

In their economy,

Godliness is not the end. It is the means.

Being close to God, being in relationship with God, liking God,

for them, those aren't the goal, those are just leverage.

The end, the goal, the most important thing,

is financial gain, well being, prosperity

Paul challenges this.

He says, 'Godliness with contentment is great gain.

That is where value lies, great value.

We brought nothing into the world.

We can take nothing out of it.

He says,

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap

and into many foolish and harmful desires

that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

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.

It is still one of my very favourite children's stories.

It always echoes in my mind.

It is about a poor fisherman.

One day he was sitting on the dock next to his boat,

looking out across the sea,

watching the seagulls overhead,

breathing the fresh air and enjoying every minute of it.

A rich man came along and sat down next to the fisherman

and asked him,

‘Why aren’t you out there fishing?’

‘I’m not fishing out there,’ he said,

‘because I’ve caught enough for the day.’

‘Why don’t you catch some more?’ the rich man asked.

And the fisherman answered,

‘What would I do with the fish?’

‘You would earn more money,’ the rich man said.

‘And with that money you could buy a motor for your boat

go into deeper waters and catch more fish

and make even more money.’

The rich man started to gain momentum.

He had a business plan.

He was a success.

He could coach success in others.

‘Pretty soon you would make enough money

to own three boats instead of one.

With those three boats you would make so much money,

that after a while you could own ten boats.

Then, after a while,

you would make so much money

that you would be as rich as I am.”

‘What would I do then?’ asked the fisherman.

‘Then you could really enjoy life,’ the rich man said.

There was a pause.

The breeze blew, the sea stretched across the horizon

you could hear the waves lapping against the pier.

It was a good moment.

‘What do you think I am doing right now?’ the poor fisherman asked.

‘Godliness, with contentment that is the great gain.

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation

and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires.’

I used to get very nervous preaching about money.

It seems like it always upsets people and I hated upsetting people.

But that was before, when I used to be a nice guy.

I don't get as worried about preaching it anymore.

Not because I'm not longer a nice guy, although that's debatable,

but because I have since come to see very powerfully

that there is a competition

going on for your soul,

and more than anything,

I want God to win your soul.

Jesus wants it too.

When asked what the greatest command is he answered,

Love the Lord your God,

with all your heart, with all you mind

with all your strength

with all your soul, with all your soul.

Among what society highly values

when it comes to the competition for your soul.

Money is probably the strongest competitor.

Money is a chameleon.

It can disguise itself to take on the qualities
we normally give to God.

By outliving us in the form of our estate,
money disguises itself as immortal, like God.

By allowing us to purchase things and comforts
it disguises itself as our provider, and the giver of life, like God.

By setting it aside for retirement
it disguises itself as our security and our future, like God.

By gaining us access
to the dinners and meetings with decision makers
it disguises itself as power, like God.

Money is a fierce competitor for our soul.

It is entirely appropriate to value the gifts that come with this life.

Family, satisfying work, travelling and seeing a part of the world
getting pampered at a spa,

a fun night with the guys watching the game.

Being outside on toys with engines.

The peace of fishing.

The fun of performing.

Even your dog or cat.

There are just so many things that are good, and add richness to life.

Money can certainly facilitate some of it.

But the risk with what we come to highly value

is that we take a good thing,

and turn it an ultimate thing.

Lose a good thing, you will be sad at its loss.

Lose an ultimate thing, you despair.

Family is a good thing.

Make it an ultimate thing,

and your life will be undone, when the kids leave home,

or someone passes,

or there is a rift.

Work is a good thing.

Make it an ultimate thing,

you won't know who you are when you retire

or lose your job

or if you don't get the promotion

You won't know who you are and what your life is about

if you aren't working.

Money is a good thing,

but it is not an ultimate thing,

it is not the most important thing.

The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

Trusting money, obeying money, making it the highest value,

will lead you away from your faith, and pierce you with many griefs.

Only God is ultimate.

Paul gives Timothy advice for putting money to its rightful place.

I love that he uses sports words, action words, Olympic words.

Flee from the love of money, run from it.

Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love,
endurance and gentleness.

Paul uses wrestling words.

Fight the good fight of the faith.

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.

How tight is your hold on your faith?

Can money easily pry off your grip?

You say no way, never Lord.

Whether you admit it or not,

there is an ordering of values in your heart.

I simply want you aware of the competitors.

It can be an Olympic competition for your soul.

Paul has other techniques to get money out of first place.

He says to Timothy,

Command those who are rich in this present world

not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth,

which is so uncertain,

but to put their hope in God.

Command them to do good.

To be rich in good deeds.

To be generous and willing to share.

This how to lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation
for the coming kingdom,
where the economy of God is founded on love.

Part of our problem, is few who read this passage think they are rich.

We always think it is about or for someone else.

This is because we have an innate tendency to compare ourselves,
with the people around us, and we compare up.

We see what a neighbour has that we don't have.

We decide that they must be rich,
and it must be nice.

But we need perspective.

When Wendy and I were first married,

we were young, starting out,

and we ran in two circles.

The first circle was with the staff at her school where she was a first year teacher.

If we were at Christmas parties,

or staff functions

people would hear

that we were in a bachelor basement apartment

that I would be in school for a long time yet,

that our car was a hand me down from Wendy's grandmother.

They would feel sorry for us.

Tell us that we'd get out of the basement one day.

Then go back to the conversation about how

their bathroom reno had been delayed

because the contractor who had been hired

to do the heated floors and heated towel racks

had been delayed.

I didn't know heated towel racks were a thing.

The second circle we were in was with my fellow students at school.

Parties of poor seminary students was cheap potato chips

and 2 litre bottles of no name pop.

In our conversations we would hear things like,

‘Your wife has a job? With benefits?!’

‘You have a car?!’

‘You have your own place?’

‘You aren’t living with your parents?’

Wow, you are rich.

When Paul tells Timothy to command those who are rich,

no one thinks he means them,

because we compare up, not down.

We don’t compare ourselves with the people in subsaharan Africa.

We need perspective on how much we actually have.

The website World Wealth Calculator can tell you where you stand

in relation to the world

which takes into account cost of living,

and the World Bank’s in depth International Comparison Project.

If you make \$12,000 a year, \$250 a week,

25 hours a week at a minimum wage job,

you are richer than 82% of the world.

Only making \$6,000 a year?

Only a student with a part time job at 12 hours a week?

You are richer than 72% of the world.

If you consider your standard of living by historical standards,
there are articles that point out that the average person today
has a higher standard of living than the billionaire of 100 years ago.

Think air travel, cars, electricity, indoor plumbing, surviving
infancy, vaccinations, contact lenses, medical care,
computers, your phone...

Get perspective.

Get your values into a proper order.

Paul wrote Timothy,

‘Command those who are rich to be generous and willing to share.’

This is another area we get caught by using the wrong perspective.

When we give, we tend to look the wrong way.

When we give, we always look at what we have given away,
then we declare ourselves generous.

What we don't look at, is what kept, what we still have.

When we give,

we give from our income.

If we have some leftover, then maybe we'll share.

We don't give from our assets,

our accumulated wealth.

That's not flow through, that's permanent

and that's mine!

Paul says you are valuing the wrong thing.

Be generous and willing to share.

Let go of what you have taken hold of,

open your hands

so that you can take hold, grab, the life that is truly life.

This congregation has learned this.

Whether its mortgage prepayment, or Nicaragua fundraising,

or a special appeals, we give,

and generously.

Sometimes I'll hear low grade annoyance.

People will get snippy, not with me directly,

but with each other.

It is the comment,

“They just keeping asking us to give to something else.”

I try and pace it so we don't get overwhelmed,

but I will never apologize for creating and naming opportunities
for you to give.

And no one will ever force you or guilt you into do so.

I am aware that everyone's circumstances are very different.

But I will never apologize for naming an opportunity,

because I want you in training.

There's a competition for your soul.

I want you to put God ahead of your money.

I want you to have your values in order

prying its fingers off that number one spot in your heart,

so that you can put the God who loves you so much

that he gave his Son - in that spot,

so you can put the God who wants to give you life,
life to the full, eternal life, - in that spot.

Having God,

Godliness, with contentment.

That, is a great gain worth striving for.

Amen.