

Sermon #968: 1 Timothy 6:6-16
6-10-12 (Trinity 1, 3rd Series Epistle), Bethany-Princeton MN

YOUR MONEY OR YOUR FAITH

Prayer: Almighty God, You know our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking: Set free Your servants from all anxious thoughts for the morrow; give us contentment with Your good gifts; and confirm our faith that according as we seek Your kingdom, You will not let us lack any good thing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (from Parish Prayers for 15th Sunday After Trinity)

The Text, 1 Timothy 6:6-16. ⁶ Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸ And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. ¹¹ But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴ that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, ¹⁵ which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen!

In the name of Jesus, who has redeemed everyone from the love of money and from the power and rule of the sins of greed and discontent:

From the movies' portrayal of bank robberies we all know the phrase, "*Your money or your life!*" – the choice a thief would give the clerk. There is no gray area in that scene. No pretending you can keep the money and also keep your life. But there's a similar choice the Bible presents here in 1 Timothy 6: *Your money or your faith!* The rich man in today's gospel learned this the hard way.

You would think that many people, many Christians at least, would find this an easy lesson to learn. As St. Paul says here: **“We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.”** It’s still “your money or your life,” eternal life that is, and your faith is the key. Without faith you can’t have eternal life. It is a black-and-white situation. Only, many Christians pretend it is a gray area. They think they can keep their faith, or their faith will be unaffected, regardless what they do with their money. This comes from dividing your life into compartments: your faith is over here, it’s spiritual, but your money and goods over there, they’re material and physical, and one doesn’t affect the other.

Inspired by God to write these words, St. Paul shows how wrong that kind of thinking is: **“Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness.”**

This is saying there is no gray area. It really is your money or your faith. It says that **“the love of money”** is not some innocent thing but it’s sinful lust, the **“desire to be rich,”** a sinful desire, **“a temptation and a snare,”** that is, a trap, it leads to **“destruction and perdition,”** a word for hell. Really disturbing is when it says what this love of money leads to: **“some have strayed from the faith.”**

Is that right? Can you really wander away from the Christian faith due to greed, envy, a materialistic attitude, or coveting? That doesn’t make sense to us. What does your attitude toward money have to do with whether you believe in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit? It’s just about money, that’s what we think. You see, we don’t take these sins very seriously. Take, for example, the opening words of this reading: **“Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ... And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.”** This is about being content with what you have. While it sounds nice, this is the Law. This is

about what God requires of you: to be content with what you have. But aren't you always wanting more? Or resenting others who have what you don't? Or you think life would be better or easier if only you had more money or opportunities. You might think others get all the breaks. Do you even think of this as discontentment? If you do realize your discontentedness, you might just think of it as being discontent with life. But since God is the one who gives you all that you have, it's really being discontent with Him – it's ungratefulness to God. It's a sin. But we shrug it off. Who can be perfectly content? we think.

There are countless other examples: our lax attitude toward offerings, giving God the left-overs and shrugging it off and pointing to all the bills that we have to pay; or how freely we spend money on ourselves, hardly being deprived of anything or waiting for anything; or parents thinking of their role in their children's lives mainly in terms of providing them with *things*. We just call this "misplacing priorities," but they are sins, sins in our attitude toward money and goods, an insatiable desire, which is what St. Paul says is the evil thing here. *Money* isn't named as the evil thing, but "**the love of money,**" the "**desire to be rich.**" But just accepting that this is how we are is an example of how you think these are sins you can live with. Which is to say, you think Jesus can live with them. You don't think it should mean that your very faith is in danger.

But this is because we tend to put faith into the "spiritual" compartment and money into the "material" compartment. Here we are being told that there is a connection between money and your faith. Which means that while money itself is material, the attitude toward money is not. Your use of money is not. It is spiritual. "**Godliness with contentment**" is incompatible with "**love of money.**" Jesus cannot coexist with greed, coveting, selfishness, or discontentment.

But this is why Jesus came into our world. He did not stay "**in [the] unapproachable light**" of which St. Paul speaks. Out of love and compassion for you

in your sin and your inability to be content as you should, He came into the material, physical world, the world of money and goods. He was even betrayed with money, and this was prophesied in the Old Testament. It's no accident that He was born into poverty. It's no accident that He lived in an earthly kingdom that had oppressive taxes. It's no accident that He had no place to lay His head. *"Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich"* (2Co 8:9). Jesus was tempted in every way you are, yet remained without sin in His attitude toward money and goods, never complaining or wanting something more or better. He was poor, yet He was perfectly content. This is how you are forgiven, by what He did for you. His perfect contentment is given to you to count for you so God sees you as if you never sinned this way and are always perfectly content in His eyes, for Jesus' sake.

St. Paul here speaks of the judging throne, first of how Jesus **"witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate,"** and yet was condemned. He took your sin – these sins too -- to be His own and was condemned, so that you would be able to stand at **"our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing,"** before **"the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords ... without spot, blameless."** It is all for Jesus' sake. He fought this good fight for you.

And yet He did this so that you would fight it too, so that you would not just give up and give in to the difficulties that money and materialism present in your life. The Gospel, the good news of all that Jesus has done for you – in this area too – gives you the strength to do what St. Paul says here: to **"flee these things"** – the temptation and "snare" presented by money and material things – **"and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith,"** that is, with His help be firm in resisting worldly, materialistic temptations out of a desire *not* to let yourself be led astray from the faith.

When I read these verses now I can't help but think of our so recently departed brother in the faith, Dick Matthewman. One of the last times I saw Dick, he told me that his children had thanked him above everything else for their faith. As Father's Day approaches next week, with fathers we think of the responsibility to provide for and protect your children, put food on the table and a roof over their head, and Dick was a steady worker, a man good at fixing things, and who stood tall as a good example for his children, all of which we associate with the essence of fatherhood. Yet at the end of his life when they had an opportunity they thanked him not primarily for those things, but above all else for their faith. Dick looked at me and said, "It was nice to know I did the right thing." Yes, he did. And it wasn't only his own children who benefitted from this; if Dick was not in church you knew he was sick, and he came to Bible class as long as he could, every week, so it wasn't just for show and he didn't just do it as long as his children were in Sunday School. Hearing God's Word truly was the most important thing in his life. This is what a "**man of God**" is like, and we need more like him especially now that he's gone ahead of us into heaven. And yes, that's an answer to the question: "What should be our attitude toward money and goods?" The right answer is to let the true faith take first place and let it govern your attitude toward your money and goods, not the other way around. Dick would be the first to say this is only with the help of God, who is our full Portion and makes us truly rich through Christ. Amen!