

Giving Sunday

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Date: 24 April 2022

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks a lot, Ruth, for reading. And as always, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet, if you find that helpful as we look at this chapter together. Let's pray and ask for God's help as we turn to his word.

Let's pray. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we recognize that we are in a culture where money often feels seductive to many of us, and money is stressful for many of us.

And so as we turn to your word now, we pray that you will give us ears to hear your instruction, hearts that are open, eyes to see Jesus, and that your truth will set us free.

For Jesus' name's sake, amen. Great. There's an Instagram account, Preachers and Sneakers. I don't know if you follow it. It shares photos of pastors and says how much their trainers cost to buy.

It was set up by a Christian guy who admits, full disclosure, that he himself owns some Nike Air Jordans. But here is Carl Lentz, a pastor in New York, wearing trainers that sell for nearly \$800.

[1 : 2 2] Next, John Gray, who leads a church in South Carolina, called Relentless Church. I just love that, that it's called Relentless Church.

I wondered if he'd named it when he was having a bad day. You know, just, this is, my life is Relentless Church. And that's what I'll call it. Anyway, trainers, over \$3,000.

And Chad Veach in Los Angeles had his whole outfit analysed. Took a photo at an airport there. He's got a Gucci backpack. The account has been criticised.

People have said, maybe the clothes and the shoes were gifts. And how do you make judgements about people's heart from their clothes? What do you think?

Can you see something about someone's heart from the clothes they wear? What do you think? And could someone make reasonable judgements about your heart from looking at your bank statement?

[2 : 2 6] Seeing where you spend your money. The passage we're looking at here is from the Apostle Paul's letter to Timothy. Timothy was his co-worker, a junior co-worker.

He was the pastor of the church in Ephesus that Paul had planted. And like Glasgow, Ephesus was a prosperous city. It was a port city.

And we read in Acts 19 that when Paul established the church there, the biggest opposition came from the merchants, concerned of the impact of the gospel on their money.

And Paul says to watch out. He says to Timothy to watch out for love of money in church leaders who were actually false teachers. He says it's one of the marks of a false teacher.

If you just look at verse 5, he describes the false teachers and their division. And then at the end of that verse, he says, they think that godliness is a means to financial gain.

[3 : 2 9] And then what follows are instructions for Paul to give... He gives them instructions from Paul to Timothy, not just for Timothy, but for him to pass on to the whole church.

So instructions for Christian living when it comes to money. Because God wants to free them. And God wants to free us from being in the grip of money.

We're not to hear this and feel fearful that God doesn't want what's best for us and he's trying to get our money off us. We're to recognize that in the goodness of God, he wants us liberated.

When the air we breathe in our society says that what we really need is more money. So we're going to think about the two big instructions in the passage, two radical instructions.

And then Paul gives us four reasons why they make sense. So two instructions. The first is be content, not covetous. Be content, not covetous. And Paul here confronts the idea that the Christian life could be used for financial gain, but he keeps the financial language.

[4 : 32] If you have a look at verse 6 of chapter 6, he says, but godliness with contentment is great gain. You see there, it's credit.

You're quids in if you're godly and content. Already in the letter, he's invited us to see the benefits of being godly. If you just go back a page and look at chapter 4, verse 8, great verse to memorize, especially if you go to the gym.

Chapter 4, verse 8, for physical training is of some value. But godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

The world doesn't want us to be godly, and in fact we ourselves, our sinful natures, don't want to be godly. And Paul says, 1 Timothy 4, 8, godliness has great value.

See the value of it. And hopefully you can think in your life of an older Christian who maybe doesn't have much money, but they're godly. And you see the gain in their life.

[5 : 38] You see the fruit of godly living in older Christians. A positivity, a hope, a steadfastness, a wisdom, a joy.

The value of godliness in this life, as well as the life to come. And Paul says, chapter 6, if you add contentment to godliness, great gain.

Your quid's in. The world says, you need more because you haven't got enough. And if we think like that, we'll always need more. The whole advertising industry is geared towards that, isn't it?

You know, as you look for something online, and then the next thing you know, everywhere you look, everything you look at online, the adverts pop up. Are you sure you don't want to visit that site again?

Don't you need that stuff you were looking at? But you can't reach contentment by getting more. Because when you get more, your tastes start to change.

[6 : 36] I remember sitting with a non-Christian friend in a pub after work. We used to go every Tuesday to the pub. And I remember him saying, he reckoned, he'd worked it out, and he reckoned, you never need more than 20 grand a year.

That's what he worked out. No one would ever need more than 20,000 pounds a year to flourish in the UK. Now, he and his wife, I reckon this week, I was trying to work it out, I reckon they probably now earn about half a million pounds a year.

And I'm sure he doesn't think anymore. That 20 grand a year is enough. I'm sure he doesn't think that. But he did. But now he earns more. He thinks he needs more.

And usually, it doesn't matter how much you earn, usually, you tend to think, there's been research on this, if I had double what I have now, that would be enough. All across the scale.

If our income grows, we turn what we used to think were luxuries into necessities. And the other thing that happens when we earn more, if we get more money, is we spend time with people with broadly similar income and wealth to us.

- [7 : 46] That's just a fact of life. Outside the church, we tend to spend our time with people who have broadly similar income and wealth to us. It's true of us as a nation.
- So we quickly forget how rich we are globally simply by having a tap with running clean water in our homes. We forget, don't we? And it's true of us in our communities, within the city.
- Because if you think about who your neighbours are, because of the flat you can afford to live in, you think about the places you go to spend your time, your hobbies. You know, whether it's that you go to Fir Hill and watch the football, or you go to a Wetherspoons pub, or you're in an exclusive golf club or tennis club.
- So if you get richer, you get surrounded by people with this new lifestyle you've never seen before. And you start to think, well, I need those things.
- Everyone's got those things. And I need those things. So instead, Paul says, be content and not covetous. And the way to be content is not to have more.
- [8 : 50] It's not to have more. It's to want less. To appreciate what we have. To practise thankfulness. Practice being thankful for what we have.
- The Bible doesn't say that it's wrong to be rich. It's not a sin to be wealthy. There's nothing particularly virtuous about being poor. What the Lord is concerned with, though, is our hearts.
- And if we find ourselves wishing we had what other people have, well, that's coveting. And that is wrong. And Paul says, godliness with contentment is great gain.
- The second command comes later in the chapter, verse 17. And it's addressed to the rich. And it's be generous, not proud. So have a look with me at verse 17. He says, 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, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.
- Now, I think there's a surprise there because I would expect Paul to say something like, command those who are rich not to be hoarders, but to be generous. Instead, his contrast is between being generous and being arrogant.
- [10 : 15] And money does that to us. When you have money, it makes you feel self-sufficient. It's one of the reasons that many people around us have forgotten God. They see no need for God because they've got money.
- And so they're used to feeling self-sufficient, independent, autonomous, and they don't respond well to a message that ultimately, for our greatest needs, we need God.
- We need a saviour. Money can make you look down on others who don't have it. And other people look up to you because in the world's eyes, if you've got money, you've achieved something.
- There's a status that comes with parking a white Range Rover outside on Park Road and being able to get your takeaways from you say bees, living in certain postcodes, wearing certain clothes, eating at certain places.
- And before we know it, often without knowing it, our sense of identity is kind of intertwined with a lifestyle that we have to have a certain income level to afford.
- [11 : 24] And instead, Paul says, if you've got money, look to make yourself rich in a different way. Verse 18, have a look. Command them to do good, that's the rich, command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.
- So be ambitious to be rich, to be rich in generosity, to be rich in goodness. So when it comes to church, the natural next question that we often ask ourselves or tend to ask is, well, how much should I give?

In churches, people have often talked about tithing. I think since I moved to Scotland, more people in churches in Scotland think about tithing than in other places I've lived. And tithing is the idea of giving 10% of your income to your church.

But tithing was an Old Testament command. The New Testament doesn't ever give us that figure of a 10th and say you need to give a 10th of what you earn.

Instead, the New Testament gives us a freedom to consider carefully and prayerfully what we have and consider carefully and prayerfully the mercy of God to us and just to look to give our money sacrificially, sensibly, joyfully as an expression of our love for Christ.

[12 : 55] So for some people, 10% might be a good figure to think of. For some people, 10% will be too much to give. If giving 10% would make you afraid of paying your debts or if you're afraid of unemployment or you are unemployed, if you have genuine fears, then the generous God doesn't need you to give that money and we shouldn't feel guilty about that.

None of what we're looking at this morning should make us feel guilty for giving what we're not able to give. For undergraduate students, it might be a small amount, it might be a very small amount that you feel able to give, but it would still be worth giving because it gets you in the good habit of giving, the good discipline of it while you're a student.

But 10% may well be too much. For others of us, 10% will be too little. We might be able to give significantly more than that.

I'll always remember the first Christian friend when I became a Christian who I saw turning the whole question of giving around as we talked about money and I realized that his whole approach to money wasn't how much do I need to give so that how much do I have left?

It was how much do I need to live on and I'll give the rest. Just completely changed the way I thought about giving. How much do I need so that I can give the rest?

[14 : 34] I don't know about you, but this kind of teaching just turns my world upside down. I became a Christian when I was 21. Growing up as a teenager and as a young adult, what I really, really wanted was to get rich.

That's what I wanted. I remember seeing a trader on TV. It was on, it was Black Wednesday, 1992. Britain had crashed out of this thing called the ERM.

You don't need to know. Some of you will remember. And this trader had made a fortune. He was on the news because some traders made a lot of money betting against the British economy. And I could see the exhilaration on his face at the money he'd made that day.

And I thought, I want to be like him. That's what I want. Because what I saw around me was that if you were rich, people respected you. And I saw people worrying about money.

And I thought, if you have money, it must take your worries away. In other words, money was the saviour. But when we come to God's word, it sets us free with the truth because when you think about it, money is a terrible saviour.

[15 : 41] it's a really bad saviour to pin your hopes on. When real tragedy comes in your life, is money really going to save you?

Of course it's not. Money doesn't save you when you have bad health. Money doesn't save you. And money might get you approval from some other people.

But what really matters in our lives is God's approval. approval. And God doesn't approve of you because of how much money you have. Money won't get your sins forgiven so that God approves of you.

What we need is a loving community. And we need a mighty God who is good and generous towards us. So God says, the best thing you can do with being rich is just be richly generous.

Giving money so that the real saviour can be made known to people and they can put their hope in him. So those are the two commands. Be content, not covetous. And be generous, not proud.

[16 : 45] But folks, these are hard commands, aren't they? They're very unnatural to us and the Lord knows that. So we're going to think about the four reasons that Paul gives why these instructions make good sense for us.

And the first reason is the reality of death. So have a look with me at verse 7. Paul says, for we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it.

I don't know if you've seen Benji Morrison this morning. Andrew was on guitar, Andrew and Becca's son. He's got a very cool cap on this morning. Loving the cap. But he wasn't born with it.

They have bought that for him. I can confirm firsthand babies bring no possessions with them when they are born. I've seen three born, no possessions. And then when we die, it doesn't matter how much gets put in the coffin.

It doesn't matter if you're an Egyptian pharaoh that gets buried with everything you had. It doesn't go with you. And so it makes sense while we're in this world just to travel light.

[17 : 46] And so we see that in verse 8, don't we? He says, but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. I remember backpacking through Africa and Asia and I just had a backpack.

backpack. So I didn't spend any time in shops buying nice souvenirs and ornaments. I had to travel light. I couldn't take anything with me. And we're being called here to see our life in this world a bit like that.

You know you're going to have to leave the things behind anyway. So why bother about the accumulation of possessions? Just travel light. The second reason Paul gives us is the dangers of riches.

We'll spend a few minutes more on this. If you just have a look with me at verse 9, 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.

And then a famous verse, for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Now I was trying to think of a trap and I thought of the movie Danny the Champion of the World.

[18 : 57] Some of you will have read the book rather than watch the film. There's a boy, Danny, whose mum has died and he's got this fabulous dad, even played by Jeremy Irons. And there's a horrible, greedy landowner, Mr. Hazel.

One false move by Danny's dad and they're going to lose their land, they live on, because of Mr. Hazel. And Danny wakes up one night and his dad's gone. It's two in the morning, can't find his dad.

And he heads out to find his dad. And he goes into Mr. Hazel's wood looking for his dad and he finds him in a trap. He's fallen into a trap.

He was walking through the wood and there's some undergrowth covering a man pit and he's fallen in. Mr. Hazel's gamekeepers have dug it and he can't get out.

He's broken his ankle and he's stuck. And if Danny can't get his dad out of the trap, they're finished. Well, Paul warns us here that we face a trap and it's wanting to get rich.

[20 : 00] That's the trap. He tells us about the bait, falling into temptation, the trap that it leads you into many foolish and harmful desires and then, verse 9, harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

Have a look at verse 9. 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.

For 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. And even as I hear that, as we hear that, I know some of you will be thinking, I won't fall down the trap.

I reckon I've got this. I reckon I can be rich and not fall in the trap. But the Bible says, wanting to get rich, it's a trap. Be careful.

And he explains that worst that could happen in verse 10. And I've seen it unfold in the lives of people around me. wandering from the faith and piercing themselves with many griefs because they wanted to get rich.

[21 : 14] I can think of people who wanted to live for Christ but they also wanted to get rich. Sometimes even spiritualizing it. If only I had more money and bought a big house, we could use it as a retreat center.

You know, we really want to get a big home so that we can host Christian unions when they want to get away. But then instead of God being the goal of life, knowing the living God and Jesus the Savior who can get that for us, money becomes the goal and the career becomes the Savior who can get it.

So they start to see opportunities at work and they say no to the needs of serving at church because they see ways that they could use that time to get in their career and they think if I do that, I'll get the money that I need.

And then maybe something like this happens that one Sunday the man says to his wife, you know, I've got a deadline coming up this week. Could you take the kids to church this week and I'll just miss this week.

I just need this morning just to get some space to work. And then he realizes what a great time Sunday morning can be. Just how productive you can be if your wife and children are at church and you head into the office when it's quiet.

[22 : 32] And bit by bit the money starts coming in but the spiritual flame starts dying out until eventually he sees Christianity as something for the kids.

And without Christian friends anymore and without spiritual disciplines he starts to say, you know what, I've got some doubts about the Christian life. I'm just not really sure it's true anymore.

And it was so predictable. And God's word says, do you want to get rich? It's a trap.

And what a picture that you could look at someone and they look as though they've got everything sorted and then they plunge into ruin. So that's our second reason to be content and to be generous, the dangers of money.

The third reason Paul gives is in verse 17. It's the generosity of God. Just have a look at verse 17 again. Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth which is so uncertain to put their hope but to put their hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

[23 : 51] So you see the two sides to it there, can't you? That wealth is so uncertain you know you can lose it. There can be a house price crash. There can be a financial crisis, a burglar, a hacker.

You can get defrauded. There can be a war. There can be inflation. But on the other side there is nothing uncertain about God's generosity and there's nothing miserly about God.

He's the generous giver. He richly provides for us. He richly provides for us and not just for our survival, verse 17, for our enjoyment. Stick with Him.

He's a water into wine kind of God. He's given us things like nature, parks, mountains, friendships, rock music, sport, Indian food.

If those things aren't your thing, think of the things that God gives you that are your thing. God is the generous provider for our enjoyment. And so God invites us to trust Him to provide.

[24 : 55] And ultimately He's given us the gift of Himself, the blessing of being united with Jesus by faith, having fellowship with Him in our lives today, and life forever with Him, like His resurrection life.

And in verse 13, Paul just reminds us of what it cost Jesus to be that generous to us. He says in verse 13, In the sight of God who gives life to everything and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession.

In other words, picture Jesus when He stood before Pilate, who humanly speaking had Jesus' life in His hands, and asked Him, Are you the King of the Jews?

And Jesus said, Yes, it is as you say. Knowing that standing on that truth would lead Him to the poverty of the cross. And He willingly did that so that He could generously share His inheritance with us.

The generosity of God. And then the fourth reason for us to be content, not covetous, generous, not proud, is in verse 19. It's the treasures of heaven. The command to be generous comes, and then verse 19, He says about being generous, In this way, they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

[26 : 28] So this is the treasure principle in the Bible, that you can't take your money with you, but you can send it on ahead. When we invest in gospel work here with our money, there's the thought that we could meet people in the new creation who were there in part because they heard about Jesus through ministries that we supported, that we enabled.

So just picture, you know, meeting a Brazilian family in the new creation who heard about Jesus through new destiny that our mission partner, Susie Reed, works at.

Or they heard about Jesus in Thailand, saved through our mission partners there. How wonderful that would be. Or they heard the gospel through the ministry here at St. Silas, and they weren't paying for it.

They weren't giving. They couldn't give, but they heard it because of the support of the church here. People giving so that Christ was proclaimed to them. And I don't know about you, but I can think of that in my own life.

I remember doing an inquirer's course at a church when I was at law school in Nottingham, and I didn't pay for it, and I was fed, and I didn't pay for that, and I was shown love and hospitality and welcomed.

[27 : 44] And I started going along to the church, and I grew, and I was encouraged, and I wasn't giving, and people were generous, so that church was able to preach Christ, and I could hear.

And I didn't have a car, and I was offered a lift to church because it was hard to get there. And a family I didn't even know heard, and they said, we'll give you a lift. And I just got the message, go to the corner of this street at 9.30, and this family will come and pick you up.

And I went to the corner of the street, and I was waiting, and this car pulled up at 9.32 or something, you know, bang on time, and the guy stopped his car just in front of me, and I went over, and I opened the door to get in the car, and he looked at me, and I looked at him, and I said, are you giving me a lift to church?

And he said, no, I'm waiting for you to cross the road. So that was awkward. But anyway, I've got, so I've got distracted, but in many other ways, people at the church were amazingly generous, and because they were giving, I got to hear about Jesus.

And we could do that here, and many people do that here. It's wonderful. It's a wonderful encouragement. Many people are doing that here. They are living simply because they know contentment is great gain, and they're living simply because they know they can't take their money with them.

[29 : 06] They're living simply because they've grasped the generosity of God, and they're giving what they have so that Jesus is proclaimed. Let's pray together. So, Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your generosity to us, that you provide so much for our rich enjoyment, and more than that, that you saw us in our sin, in our lostness, and Jesus came to find us, to seek us, and to save us.

Thank you for your words that liberates us to see money the way you would have us see it. And so we pray that you would be at work by your Spirit in our hearts, that we might be content and generous for the glory of your name.

Amen. Let's sing together in response to God's Word. Amen. Let's sing together in response to God's Word. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.