

1 Timothy 6:3-10, 17-19  
On Being Rich  
WRCOB 5.17.20

I went for my daily walk one day last week.

It was a nice day, sunny and comfortable.

I felt like I had walked back in time to my childhood.

Children were out riding their bikes up and down the road.

Whole families, I am not talking about just one family  
I'm seeing like five or six families  
Out walking or riding their bikes.

I see people sitting on their front porch or driveway  
Visiting with neighbors as they walked by.

There was conversation between neighbors  
The sound of children playing  
And the laughter and chatter of adults!

It was an old familiar scene  
Made refreshingly new because of the corona virus.

It is the result of a shift in focus.

People are beginning to appreciate a slower lifestyle  
And the simpler things that life has to offer.

Now I know my family is fortunate.

Both my wife and I continue to work.

I know there are neighborhoods  
Not experiencing what my neighborhood experiences.

I realize people are hurting  
Loss of jobs, loss of income  
Struggling to make ends meet.

I know it's a real hardship for many.

I hope that we might be sensitive to the needs around us  
And do our part to help out where we might.

For we are all in this together.

Subsequently, as we move into Phase One  
On reopening Virginia  
We must consider the needs of others.

The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus  
Announced Wednesday

That the consequences of reopening too early  
Could fall disproportionately on people of color.

And so the question is . . .  
What's more important  
The health of our economy?  
Or the health of our people?

When it comes to money  
Jesus has a few words to say.

Jesus says, in the Sermon on the Mount  
That you cannot serve both God and money

That it's easier  
For a camel to go through the eye of the needle  
Than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.

Haddon Robinson writes,

*“For every verse in the Bible  
That tells us the benefit of wealth  
There are ten that tell us the danger of wealth.”*

The lesson for us today is simply this . . .  
Being rich has little to do with being rich.

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Our Scripture Lesson today  
Is taken from a letter the Apostle Paul wrote  
To a young pastor named Timothy.

Paul had sent Timothy to the church at Ephesus  
Because the church had problems.

One of the problems the church faced  
Was the problem of bad preaching.

Not bad preaching as in boring sermons  
But bad preaching as in preaching false doctrine.

Their preachers were preaching something contrary  
To the teachings of Jesus.

Paul accuses them of arrogance and ignorance.

Rather than building unity  
Their words were causing division.

To them, preaching a godly life was a way of getting wealthy.

Probably not unlike  
What we see around us today . . .

Pastor tooling in their private jets  
Living in their earthy mansions  
Drowning in luxurious living.

It feels like Paul is addressing  
This issue of prosperity preaching.

The idea that if we have enough faith  
If we pray hard enough and long enough  
If we do all the right things  
And if we send in enough money

God will bless us with material wealth.

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Paul counters these false doctrines arguing  
That a spiritually healthy and wholesome life  
Has nothing to do with great wealth  
That wholesome living is in itself great wealth.

So if being rich is not the answer to being content  
What is?

What does being rich towards God really mean?

Jesus talks about storing up treasures in heaven  
As opposed to treasures on earth

What he simply means is that the real riches in life  
Have little to do with real riches.

But really . . . what constitutes a rich life?  
What brings real contentment?

According to the Bible  
Contentment has few needs and few wants.

As Paul says in our Scripture Lesson today  
If we have food and clothing  
We will be content with that.

The Greek philosopher, Epictetus, from 100 AD wrote

*Contentment comes not so much from wealth  
As from few wants.*

An Arab proverb says

*The richest person is not the one who has the most  
But the one who needs the least.*

The Apostle Paul advised the young pastor, Timothy  
To teach those who are wealthy  
Not to trust in their money

But to trust in God  
Who richly gives us what we need for our enjoyment.

That instead of hoarding and protecting our wealth  
Be always ready to share with those in need.

This is where you find the true riches in life.

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From Joseph Stowell, President of Cornerstone University

*“The real point of materialism is not how much we have but what has us. It’s not what we hold, but how tightly we hold it. Not what we have but how we got it.*

*The test of materialism is whether our goods have made us proud or grateful, self-sufficient or God-sufficient.”*

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From the Voice in the Wilderness, Leadership Magazine

*[Money will buy a house but not a home]*

*Bed but not sleep*

*Books but not brains*

*Medicine but not health*

*[Money will buy] luxury but not culture*

*Amusements but not happiness*

*Religion but not salvation*

*[Money will buy] a passport to anywhere but heaven.*

Jesus warns us that, if given a chance  
Money can and will change the way we behave.

A Boston Globe newspaper article agrees.

The title of the article might tell us something  
*Why it matters that our politicians are rich*

It may speak to our current situation  
And the push to reopen the country.

*Science is finding that money actually changes how you think and act—and not for the better.*

Here are some of its findings.

*Rich people have a harder time connecting with others, showing less empathy to the extent of dehumanizing those who are different from them.*

*They are less charitable and generous. They are less likely to help someone in trouble. And they are more likely to defend an unfair status quo.*

*If you think you'd behave differently in their place, meanwhile, you're probably wrong: These aren't just inherited traits, but developed ones. Money, in other words, changes who you are.*

The article went on to summarize research studies  
Conducted by Kathleen Vohs  
At the University of Minnesota.

*Vohs and her colleagues have found that even the mere suggestion of getting more money—a technique known as "priming"—makes people less friendly, less sensitive to others, and more likely to support statements like "some groups of people are simply inferior to others."*

*Another series of studies from the University of California at Berkley concluded that wealthier people tend to be less compassionate towards others in a bad situation than people from lower-class backgrounds.*

We are all desirous for reopening our country.

But we must do so deliberately  
Taking into account all its impact.

Let the decision not be based on  
Our personal need to restore our fortunes.

Because if that be the case  
We're chasing the wrong dream.

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It reminds me of a story by the late Fred Craddock.

He was visiting in the home of his niece  
Who had adopted an old greyhound race dog.

Now, I don't know if you've ever seen a dog race  
But to get the dogs to run  
They place a mechanical rabbit in front of them.

The dogs chase the rabbit around the track.

Anyway, Craddock strikes up a conversation with the dog.  
Use your imagination.

“Are you still racing?”

“No,” the greyhound replied.

“Well, what was the matter? Did you get too old to race?”

“No, I still had some race in me.”

“Well, what then? Were you not winning?”

“I won over a million dollars for my owner.”

“Well, did he treat you badly, then?”

“Oh, no,” the dog said.

“We were treated quite well while we were racing.”

“Were you injured?”

“No.”

“Then why? Why aren’t you racing?”

“I quit.”

“You quit? Why would you quit?”

“I just quit because

After all that running and running and running

I found out that the rabbit I was chasing wasn’t even real.”

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Perhaps this pandemic crisis we are in

Has a few lessons for us.

That the stay-at-home mandate builds relationships  
In our families  
In our neighborhoods  
And towards Mother Earth.

That our primary focus should shift  
From the incessant thirst  
For more and more material wealth  
To a simpler lifestyle.

We need to learn  
That the health, wealth and well-being of all  
Should be everyone's concern.

And that decisions should be based on  
What is most beneficial to the common good of all.

Jesus teaches us that the real riches in life  
Have little to do with real riches.

That being really rich  
Doesn't have anything to do with being really rich.

The Apostle Paul teaches we should learn these lessons  
**So that we may take hold of the life  
That is truly life (1 Tim. 6:19b).**