

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).**