

#46 15-16

Psalm 91:1-6, 14-16

Jeremiah 32:1-3a, 6-15

Luke 16:19-31

1 Timothy 6:6-19

Godly Contentment

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time – he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

We've all seen them - these people who strive desperately after some sort of recognition, because they have never had to suffer or earn their luxurious lifestyle. Like - the people who are famous due merely to the fact that they have money, and it is money they inherited. We all know the stereotypes - people who have been brought up on wealth and privilege, and have no idea what it means to have to sacrifice or worry about things that money cannot buy. And the idea is that we all want to be just like them. How wonderful life would be if we never had to worry about finances, and the important life giving things that money can bring. If we wanted a doctor - or surgery - or a trip to somewhere - or a special thingamabob - we could just get it. It sounds pretty awesome.

And yet, Paul is writing to Timothy speaking of a different kind of life in contrast to that, and not because of sour grapes - but because he knows what a tremendous human experience a life of faith offers which money could never come close to offering.

A life of faith offers a human an awareness that borders on heaven - that offers eternity - that creates feelings of love and closeness which are indescribable!

I am reminded of the famous poem written in 1897 by Edwin Arlington Robinson - which later became a song by Simon and Garfunkel - called "Richard Cory". "The poem describes a person who is wealthy, well educated, mannerly, and admired by the people in his town. Despite all this, he fatally shoots himself in the head."
(Wikipedia)

There is a discontent about such lives, as though their very humanity is limited by the degree of worldly things their lives are focusing on. We would all love to worry less and feel secure and confident in what may happen in the future, but the trueness, the Godliness, the pureness of our purpose for life is that our human endeavors must be focused on our human relationships. And our focus on all things other than those, is a dangerous distraction.

We may say, "Yes but . . . the world is a harsh place and money offers security, money offers pleasures, money is important!" And I think God knows that, too! Paul is warning Timothy, and us, that we need to keep that all in mind, but not make it our goals in life. If we are to call ourselves followers of Christ, we must make the love and care for all those he loved and cared for the goal of our efforts. And that calls for an adventure into our souls, not so much a striving for recognition and acclaim, or money or possessions - but a striving for self awareness and kindness which comes from knowing the grace of God for us as well.

Our human tendency appears to be to avoid self reflection; take the easiest path to success; suppress painful memories; distract ourselves from anything requiring growth or awareness. Life, we think, should be all about how much fun we can have, and anything less than that is unfair! We deserve only good things!

Carl Jung wrote, "Knowing your own darkness is the best method for dealing with the darkneses of other people." The concept of befriending the shadow within our souls is an ancient spiritual practice, and a modern psychological awareness. And here is where the greatest sense of contentment truly comes in our experience of human life. When we have travelled into our darkest parts of ourselves and become aware of them, we gain a strength - a power - because we know we are not alone. We can recognize when others are going through the same darkness, and we offer comfort - we offer words of hope - we offer truths about our faith which we would never have been able to share with confidence had we not been there ourselves.

This is loving the Lord our God with ALL our hearts and ALL our soul and ALL our minds - THIS is truly being able to LOVE our neighbors - love our enemies - LOVE!!! As long as we are hiding and denying the depths of our beings, we cannot love to the depths of our being! So our lives become superficial, all about acquiring things, and distancing ourselves from those humans who scare us because they remind us of what we are avoiding inside our own depths.

This scripture is about finding eternal life - finding contentment - in a life with God, and that cannot be done any other way, than by searching within ourselves for our greatest pain, and experience the presence of Christ there. And when we know the contentment with God - we can offer such grace and life to those around us - and that brings us a life far fuller and mind blowing than anything money can buy!

Paul is telling us to grasp this life! "Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life." There is an energy - an urgency - It requires no ability to bench press or box - it requires a desire to love God - to "shun [the love of money and the pains it brings and to]; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness."

We are all being called to look within ourselves for all that could possibly be considered idolatrous - a worship of something that is not truly God. Because, plainly speaking - worship of anything other than the source of our most pure human capacities will bring us so much pain and confusion. And it could be destructive to our lives, and the lives of those we love. The greatest atrocities of our human history have been brought about by narcissists who craved power and were able to convince others to join them, or to be afraid of them. Against such foes, our God has always called us to dedicate our lives! And furthermore, our God has always fought alongside of those courageous believers who stood against the powers of darkness.

Let us trust in the eternal, dominion of God, and seek our lives through that companionship, and that power.
AMEN