

**Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 25, 2016**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

1 Timothy 6:6-16 (NIV)

But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7) For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8) But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 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. 10) 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. 11) **But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.** 12) Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 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, I charge you 14) to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15) which God will bring about in his own time-- God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16) who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

**"Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"** is one of the most famous phrases in the United States Declaration of Independence. In spite of the adage, "Money can't buy you happiness," in the minds of many there is a direct connection between the pursuit of happiness and the pursuit of riches. An unknown individual once commented: *Money can't buy happiness, but it can buy you the kind of misery you prefer.* The American fascination with money led Arthur Hoppe, who was at one time a well-known columnist for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, to declare: ***We ought to change the legend on our money from "In God We Trust" to "In Money We Trust." Because, as a nation, we've got far more faith in money these days than we do in God.*** ~ Arthur Hoppe, 1963

In reality, this fascination with wealth and riches is universal among sinful human beings. Greed tempts us all. That is why the apostle Paul in our text encourages us to

**Theme:** Pursue True Riches

1. Godliness with contentment is great gain
2. Greed for the wealth of this world leads to the ultimate loss
3. Take hold of eternal life

Immediately before our text, Paul condemned those who think that godliness is means to financial gain. He now continues with that thought by saying that those who think and act that way have got it backwards: **But godliness with contentment is great gain.** Paul continues: 7) **For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.** 8) **But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.** True godliness is faith in the Lord Jesus together with the kind of life that faith produces. Paul reminds us that everything we have is a gift from our gracious God as he points out that we begin and end life with nothing of our own. His words put "things" into perspective for us and lead us to say, "May the name of the Lord be praised for the much or the little I have." Trust in our Savior God enables us to enjoy contentment in life regardless of the circumstances because we are confident of God's ever-present love, care, and concern. In his letter to the Philippians, the Apostle explains how it is possible for us to be content with the simple basics of food and covering (which could include shelter as well as clothing) as the original language of this text implies. (Philippians 4:12-13 NIV) **I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have**

**learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13) I can do all this through him who gives me strength.**

Such a faith is based on the solid promises of Scripture such as we read in Psalm 34:10 ... **those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.** (NIV) The Lord Jesus himself inspires our contentment with these words: (Matthew 6:31-33 NIV) **So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32) For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33) But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.**

What more could we need or desire than this promise from the Lord? (Romans 8:31-32 NIV) If God is for us, who can be against us? 32) He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Could there be greater gain?

Still even Christians are tempted to chase after worldly riches. This is why as the apostle encourages us to Pursue True Riches he warns us about the dangers which go along with the desire for riches.

**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. 10) 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.**

Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Poor Lazarus presents to us familiar sequence of events: The desire for riches leads to yielding to temptation, becoming trapped in sinful choices, leading to foolish, senseless, and ultimate ruin. As is often the case, the folly of the pursuit of riches doesn't become obvious to the individual until it is too late. The rich man in Jesus' parable had it all – yet he had not lived a life of faith. In his greed, he wasn't even willing to spare even the crumbs from his table with the beggar, Lazarus. The life-style that led to his ruin did not become evident until he died and found himself trapped in hell.

Love of money led Judas to betray his Lord and ultimately to despair that took his own life. These examples help us to understand why the Lord warns us that the love of money is the root of all evil.

It's clear that there is nothing inherently evil about wealth and money. Money is a blessing from our Lord – the Lord made Jacob and Abraham wealthy. He has also made us rich – enabling us to enjoy so much more than just the basics of food and covering. And yet, instead of enjoying contentment we often are lead astray by sinful greed. It's not the money that is sinful – it's the attitude the heart takes toward money which is the problem. To love money, to be eager for money, that leads to all kinds of evils as we see in the case of the rich young man who wanted to follow Jesus. Outwardly, he lived a virtuous life but he loved his money and as a result, he ended up tragically turning away from Christ.

What a contrast Paul has provided for us: contentment under God's promises verses greed that leads to ultimate ruin. It's no wonder Paul continues by writing: **11) But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 12) Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life ...**

By the grace of God, you and I have been called out of the darkness of sin and into the light of life. The Lord Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate and was crucified for our sins so that through faith in him we have become heirs of eternal life. Through faith in Christ Jesus, we are numbered among the children of God – men

and women of God – whom Paul encourages to run away from the pursuit of riches and the evils associated with love of money.

He would instead have us fight the good fight of faith as we take hold of eternal life by running toward righteousness, godliness, faith love, endurance, and gentleness. Paul is addressing his words to Timothy – a young pastor – but his words don't just apply to those like myself who are in the public ministry. Jesus reminds us that no pastor and no Christian can serve both God and money when says: (Luke 16:13 NIV) **"No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money."**

Paul is well aware of the fact that as a man of God strives to live a righteous and godly life, as he seeks to grow in faith and love, as he patiently endures affliction and shows gentleness toward fellow sufferers, that he will be fleeing the greed that looks only to self. He is also aware of the fact that the man of God is continually attacked and assaulted by the Devil, the world, and his own sinful flesh. That is why he encourages us to fight the good fight of faith. Faith puts God first as Luther reminds us in his explanation to the first commandment; "We should fear, love and trust in God above all things." Faith is believing the trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:5) and gave himself as a ransom for all men (1 Timothy 4:10). Faith clings to and follows all the truths of Scripture.

Paul's call to fight the good fight of faith is not an encouragement to muster our own strength. Peter tried that and failed miserably. Rather Paul's words are an encouragement to take up the battle using the full armor supplied by God himself: the belt of truth...the breastplate of righteousness...the gospel of peace...the shield of faith...the helmet of salvation...the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. The call to battle is a call to use the weapons God places into our hands, especially the word of God. When Satan or his evil associates attack -- cut them down with "it is written" as the Lord Jesus did. Draw your strength from the Word of the Lord.

By faith, we take hold of eternal life. It's not just some temporal benefit like life, liberty, happiness or power honor or wealth that is at stake. The pursuit of true riches involves a much greater prize – the gift of eternal life. May the Lord strengthen us in this pursuit until **the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15) which God will bring about in his own time--God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16) who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.**