

September 25, 2022  
1 Timothy 6:6-19  
Luke 16:19-31

Flee Riches, Pursue love

Flee from the love of riches. Instead, pursue godliness and love. Run away from greed and envy and selfish ambition. Instead, chase after righteousness, faith, endurance, and gentleness. Abandon the false promises of money. Lean into the promises of God.

This is what the apostle Paul is writing to his friend Timothy. Timothy to whom the letter is addressed, is the pastor of a church in Ephesus.

And Paul is advising him on how to teach his congregation. They are to live peaceably. To stay true to God's word. To avoid wrangling. To practice hospitality. To not be led down that path of temptation offered by riches. Instead, they should be satisfied with what they have.

"Remind them," Paul says, "that they brought nothing into the world, and they will take nothing out." If the people love only money, they will be plunged into ruin and destruction. Their faith will not be faith in the Lord, it will be faith in material things. To avoid this, Paul says they must do three things. First, they must be content with what you have. Second, they must open their eyes and see the suffering in the world.

And third, they must share what they have, instead of keeping it for themselves.

Paul writes to Timothy about money because we are always tempted by money. Humans always want more than what we have. Our hearts desire something bigger, something better, something shinier. But once we have it, we aren't satisfied, we want something more. We are never happy. We are always worried that we don't have enough. And the world plays on that worry. Do you have enough cheese on that pizza? Is one sweater really enough? Don't you need a couple more? Wouldn't you like a better phone that you could show off to your friends?

Wouldn't you like some fresh pineapple, and wouldn't you really prefer eating it in Hawaii on an all-inclusive tour?

Our hearts are made to desire things. And we try to satisfy that desire with possessions and whatever treasures we prefer. The apostle Paul reminds us that we will never be satisfied, so it's time to be content.

That being content is where we will find the greatest riches and earn the greatest profit. Paul offers us a play on words with that notion of gain or increase. Riches and wealth offer gain, but contentment offers another

kind. A better kind. Contentment is its own kind of treasure. Because you value what you have.

To be content, Paul says, you will need to shun the love of money. Run away from it. The Greek word Paul uses, (fe-ugo) fay-you-go, doesn't just mean just ignoring it or avoiding it. It means literally turning around and escaping. Fleeing from this desire, as if it is a guy with a hockey mask and a chain saw. Don't accept it. And don't ignore it as if it's not there. Run! Flee! Get away! Remove yourself from the presence of the love of money because it will lead to ruin and destruction. It will take root and grow into all kinds of evil.

Be content with what you have instead, Paul says. Appreciate what you have. Value what you have. If you need to, think about what it would be like to have nothing. No family. No home. No school, no job, no friends. No healthy body to get you around with ease. Pretend it is all taken away. And then you get it back. Notice how much it means. Notice how much it's worth. It's more than enough. And when you have is what you want, then you are happy. But when it isn't, then what you have is

disappointment and resentment. We become blind to joy. We become blind to the treasure and beauty of what is around us.

Shun the love of money, Paul says. Flee from it. Run away from it, Timothy, Man of God. That's what Paul calls Timothy. Man of God.

You, who belong to God; you, who are claimed by God and whom God claims; run away from that desire for more. For riches and profit. Shun all of it, Man of God. It's important to note that the word Man is not gender specific. Anthropos means person or human being. It applies to everything kind of person. Humans like you are tempted to chase after wealth. But you, human of God, chase after righteousness. Chase after godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Pursue it. That's what the word, dioko--dee-oh-koh, means in Greek, it means to hunt something or chase it. It means you are hot on its trail, looking for it, hoping to capture it. O human being of God, go after what is of God, and be ready to pounce on it.

To do that, we must have our eyes open. And that's our second point today. To chase after it, we must be looking for it. We must have our eyes open to everything around us. In the gospel of Luke, we hear about

a very rich man, who does not have his eyes open. He is a caricature of the very wealthy. His clothes are fine linen, not the harsh homespun garments of the poor. His robes are purple, a color only the very rich could afford it. He feasts sumptuously on elaborate meals not just on specially occasions, but every day; the best food and most expensive wine. He is a person of opulence and excess. Not a person of God. And at his gate, there lies a poor man named Lazarus, who is starving and covered in sores.

The rich man doesn't notice Lazarus. He doesn't want to. He doesn't need to. He has enough to do, keeping up with his own fabulous lifestyle. That is, until the day he dies, as every human will end up doing. Lazarus dies as well. And Lazarus is carried off to heaven, to sit next to the patriarch Abraham. But the rich man goes to Hades, where he is in torment and agony. The rich man and Lazarus have switched places. The one who was comfortable now suffers, and the one who suffered is now comfortable. And only now does the rich man see Lazarus. Before he didn't care to. He had excuses and justifications. But

now that he suffers, he wishes someone would notice. He wishes Lazarus would notice. He wishes he had known better.

In life, the rich man didn't see Lazarus. He didn't see him starving. He didn't see dogs licking his sores. He didn't help him. And then one day, it was too late. But the moral of the story is that it's not too late for us. This story is a cautionary tale, reminding us to see the ones at our gate. To see the dreadful suffering around us and help however we can. To share our plenty and the riches we have. To stop chasing our own comfort. And instead, chase godliness, righteousness, faith, love and endurance.

O man of God. O woman of God, O human being of God, shun the love of money. Run away from the insulated, comfortable life. Run from the temptation to look away from the suffering of the world. From self-indulgence and self-centeredness; and run toward God. Run toward the God who eases our suffering. Who does not turn a blind eye to us. Who does not avoid us or the pain of the world. Who does not keep joy all to God's self, but wants to share it with us. Who sees as messy and wadded up in beggar's clothes as we are at God's doorstep. And offers us the

treasures of heaven. Jesus Christ, God sees us and invites us to see one another. And to have eyes for what matters.

Run away from the love of money. And run toward righteousness and faith and love. Be content. See those around you before it's too late. And share what you have. That's the third lesson today. The rich man in our story didn't share. He kept all he had for himself. And then life was over, and it was too late for him to change. But couldn't he warn those still alive? Couldn't Lazarus tell those living as if there were no tomorrow, to live as if there is a tomorrow? The reply is no. The people living now should know better. Because of Moses and the prophets and that feeling in our gut and that whisper in our heart. WE should know better. We should know what the Lord requires of us. And if we don't, we won't be convinced even if someone came back from the dead to tell us.

Either your heart is set on God, or it's set on you. Either you pursue wealth, or you pursue love. You can't do both. You can't serve two masters. God asks us to share what we have. To see the need around us and open our hands. To trust there will be enough. To believe God has

provided everything RICHLY for our enjoyment, as Paul says. The money we have is a tool. It is a means to an end. But IT IS NOT THE END. The end, our end is in God. And whatever we have, we are to be generous with it. To do good with it. To share a foretaste of the life that is to come with it.

Be ready to share your treasure, and you will have treasure in heaven. O man, O woman of God, you will be a man, a woman a person of God, like Jesus, who shared what he had. Who took on our human suffering, so that we might share in his glory. So we might have life that truly is life. Be content. Be ready to see. Be ready to share. For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.