

## Proper 21C: Godliness with Contentment is Great Gain

1. Today we round out our brief look at Paul's first letter to Timothy
  - a. As we've been saying, this is one of three pastoral letters (including II Tim and Titus) that he wrote to give advice to the men he appointed in Ephesus and Crete.
    - i. Unfortunately, our pericope system (the order of readings we follow) skips ahead from chapter 2 last week to 6 this week – so we miss all the admonitions in between
    - ii. And starting next week the readings go to II Tim, so it wasn't a complete survey of the letter but an overview.
  - b. As Paul concludes his pastoral advice to Timothy, he ends with the proper way to regard worldly wealth
    - i. In fact, this week the theme of money and its proper use are in all of our readings because wealth can be hindrance to faith and faithful living
    - ii. The antidote to a life of covetousness centered on money is a spirit of contentment as Paul says today, "**But godliness with contentment is great gain...**" (1Ti 6:6) – that was Paul's word to Timothy 2000 years ago and God's promise to you today – Godliness with contentment is great gain!
  - c. All of us at some point have to wrestle with the question, "Are you content?" And what brings you contentment? What does the world offer for contentment?
    - i. All you have to do is look at our advertisements to know what the world believes is necessary to be content: money, fame, popularity, beauty – if you have these in abundance you'll be content.
    - ii. But when does the search for these things end, when is enough...enough?
    - iii. I believe I've made reference to the quote from the 1980s film Wall Street in sermons before, but I think Michael Douglas' speech in the movie was spot on regarding the worldly view of money, "**Greed is good...greed is right...greed works. Greed captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit for life, love, knowledge, money...greed has marked the upward surge of mankind.**" (so quintessential 80s!)
  - d. But is greed good...is the endless accumulation of things that which brings contentment?
    - i. How many times have we seen the pop star, athlete, or billionaire flame out in drug addiction, brokenness, and suicide?
    - ii. They ostensibly had everything the world values but it didn't help.
2. Let's take a look at our readings for God's perspective on contentment because Godliness with contentment is great gain – not greed.
  - a. In the Gospel of Luke, the faithful use of wealth provides the context for the 16th chapter which is where we find our Gospel lessons from last week and this week.
    - i. Last week we heard about the steward who used his position of authority for his own gain and then to dishonestly secure favor for himself after he was fired

- ii. Today He continues with the parable of Lazarus and the rich man saying, **“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.”** (Lk 16:19)
    - iii. By contrast, **“at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.”** (Lk 16:20)
  - b. Clearly the rich man loved money more than God - money was his god.
    - i. We know this because of where he ended up after death, and how he treated Lazarus, i.e. ignored him as though he didn't exist.
    - ii. According to Jesus Mt 22:37-39 the Greatest commandment is: **‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ ...And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’**
    - iii. The rich man loved no one but himself, he got what he deserved, what his greed bought him
  - c. In the OT book of Amos the prophet decries the wealthy in Israel who idled their time away ignoring the plight of others.
    - i. Amos was a prophet sent by God to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the 700s BC before they fell to the Assyrians because of their faithlessness.
    - ii. Amos paints picture of extravagant wealth, **“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils,”** (Amo 6:4-6)
    - iii. The rich were, like in Jesus' parable, feasting sumptuously, living a life of idle ease
    - iv. Amos takes aim at their indolence when he says, **“but [they] are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!”** – the northern Kingdom was led by the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, he was saying they ignored rampant idolatry and sinfulness of the nation.
  - d. The endless pursuit of wealth has the effect of blunting our attention to those around us, we are consumed with what we've got and what we don't have yet.
    - i. This is a 9/10<sup>th</sup> commandment issue – **“You shall not covet your neighbor's house or his wife, man servant/maid servant, ox or donkey or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.”**
    - ii. We are called first to be content with the wealth and possessions the Lord has given us and to use them for the sake of His kingdom and the service of people.
- 3. That's what Paul is reminding Timothy as he closes his letter
  - a. And it's so appropriate for us today in 21<sup>st</sup> century America – we must always be reminded that godliness with contentment is great gain!

- i. Listen to what Paul says in our reading, **“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.”** (1Ti 6:9-10)
  - ii. This is an easy trap for us to fall into, especially in America where we are privileged to live in a country of plenty, with many opportunities to create wealth and obtain almost anything.
  - iii. I used to love that quote from “Wall Street” that I mentioned earlier, if you’d asked me what I wanted for my life when I was in HS I would have said to be rich, I had bought into the American lie.
  - iv. Greed is particularly detrimental to our faith because it replaces our faith and trust in God above all things with our faith and trust in money as Paul says, **“It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”** (I Tim 6:10)
- b. But Jesus promises us contentment when we put our faith and trust in Him, a contentment that nothing else can compare to.
- i. Listen to what He said to the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, **“but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”** (Joh 4:14)
  - ii. And again in John 6, **“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”** (Joh 6:35)
  - iii. The joy, the contentment, that comes from knowing that you have a loving God Who took it upon Himself to be born in our flesh to deliver and save us by His own death on the cross, that He has prepared a place for you by His side in heaven forever far eclipses any fleeting satisfaction that comes from the endless cycle of acquiring money and things – remember he who dies with the most toys – still DIES!
  - iv. But he who puts his faith and trust in Christ has an inheritance kept for him in heaven that will never perish, spoil or fade come what may in this life – godliness with contentment is indeed great gain!