

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 19-- September 26th and 29th, 2013

1 Timothy 6:6-16 (NIV – 1984)

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. 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.

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 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. 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 to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time -God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 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.

Dear brothers and sister who live their lives to thank their Lord and Savior. Amen

Listen to these statements:

- “We’ve got to get more new members so that we can pay the bills.”
- “If we don’t grow, we’ll never be able to pay off our loans.”
- “Our financial troubles would be over if all those members giving nothing would pay their fair share.”

Do you see the problem with those statements? Have you ever heard any of those things said, by good Christian people, people who were looking to do God’s will? Have thoughts like that ever bounced around in your head? First, is there any truth to them? From a business model, those might seem to be fiscally accurate. But you know they’re wrong, right? They’re wrong, not because they contradict any economic indicators. They’re wrong because they show a lack of focus. Well, actually, it isn’t so much a *lack* of focus as a focus on the wrong thing.

I’ve heard it all too often from those looking for an excuse not to be in church. They say, “The church is all about money. That’s all they’re after.” It’s sad when they are right, isn’t it? But, today, in our text from 1 Timothy, Paul dispels all that. The very first word of our text tells us that those people are wrong. The church is not all about money. You see, just before our text, Paul was warning young Pastor Timothy about false teachers that saw religion as a means for financial gain, those who acted as if the church *was* all about money. But Paul’s first word shatters that: “But”. “But” – such is not the case for you, it is not the case for us. Instead, to the contrary, godliness, religion, a heart that is content in those things...that is great gain.

So today, as we study 1 Timothy 6, we’ll witness the battle between love of money and contentment in our own hearts, the challenge to come down on the right side between using godliness for gain or using gain for godliness. This is the same lesson Jesus was teaching in our Gospel Lesson story of the rich man and Lazarus. And as we know from God’s Word, we’ve got the goal of sharing the gift of life by sharing our faith - letting our love speak. So today, God’s Word shows us that **Love Speaks with Focused Heart.**

Sermon Theme: Love Speaks With a Focused Heart!

- 1. It’s a heart filled with love that overcomes the love of money**
- 2. It’s a heart that is filled with love that seeks to serve the God of Love.**

Love speaks with focused heart because real Love overcomes the love of money. That's an easy thing to say, right? Think of how familiar so many of these words of the text are. **"Godliness with contentment is great gain."** "You can't take it with you," Right? **"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."** You've heard those truths plenty of times, even if you didn't realize they were Scriptural. They are truths that are easy to agree to.

But they are not truths that are easy to live. Because there is so much grey, isn't there? Think about how fine the line is between responsible stewardship (planning for your future) and sinful selfishness. How often hasn't a concern to be good stewards so subtly shifted until decisions are made and actions are taken that reveal the selfishness in our own hearts? "We want to take care of what's given to us" becomes wanting to take care of what is ours. Do you see the so subtle shift?

Let's examine a couple of these proverbs. Verse 6: **"Godliness with contentment is great gain."** "Godliness" – is a Greek word that describes the living of worship – giving glory to God with one's life. That's where gain is, not a going-through-motions, but true daily worship, sacrifice, selflessness, a god-first mentality that is content to give to others. That's where real gain is.

Now contrast that with the love of money that **is a root of all kinds of evil**. Notice he doesn't say money is a root of evil – it's our attitude toward it. If our attitude is true godliness, we're loving God more than anything in this life. But Satan is so good at setting that trap, slowly leading us from seeing money as a means to an end to seeing money as the goal.

And then, no matter how much we repeat these proverbs, it becomes clear. It's been said, "Your actions are so loud I can't hear what you're saying." Has that ever happened to you? They can hear you say that God comes first, but a quick look at your calendar shows he's somewhere around 12th in your time management; a look at the budget shows he's lucky to get my leftovers; even an objective view of my volunteer time shows me wanting it my way or I won't be happy – that's pride first, not God first. Way too often we try to love both God and Money, but you know what Jesus said about that – it's impossible. And that god of money can't do anything for us. He can't even give anything to us. He just takes. Money takes your peace of mind as you just have more stuff to worry about. It takes your time as you have to worship at the altar of work to get more and then have to take care of all the stuff you get. It takes your conscience as rules get bent and lines crossed. It takes your happiness if your goal is the paycheck because then you're distraught when you don't get the raise and arrogant if you do. Money gives nothing but takes everything.

Now I know no one sets out to worship money – but, somehow, I think we'd all agree, it has become America's idol. And we are Americans. Think of it this way. Imagine yourself up on a ladder, cleaning the gutters. You don't want to have to climb down and move the ladder one more time. You're sure you can reach. As you stretch out away from the support of the ladder and more and more your center of gravity moves, suddenly, you find yourself in a precarious position, and... If you would have noticed how off balance you were, you wouldn't have fallen, but midair on the way down is too late. Paul uses the word – "trap". You don't realize it's a trap until it snaps.

If you would have noticed how much selfishness was compromising your ability to live a godly life, to be a godly witness...if you would have noticed how the god of Money was taking away your ability to speak God's glory, you would have stopped – but (snap) it is a trap. If you want your love to speak, your stuff can't be where your focus is.

2. **It's a heart that is filled with love that seeks to serve the God of Love.**

But for all the times you've been trapped, for all the times we've failed – look at the rest of our text. That "but" still applies. We see it again in verse 11. **"BUT you, man of God, flee from all this and pursue righteousness."** You see, love speaks with a focused heart because love sees the one we speak about. Paul writes in verse 11, **"Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness."** Really, pursue Jesus. He tells you to **"fight the good fight of faith."** It is a battle. There are casualties, and maybe those casualties are some of the things this world values so highly. But look at what

you are going for. Verse 12: **“Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called.”** That’s worth more than everything in the world, and it comes, verse 13: **“In the sight of God”**. As we stand here looking at things from God’s angle, through God’s lens, we see the one who gives life to everything, who gives us life.

He gave us his life, as he kept his laser focus on the will of God, not the money bag - as he saw people instead of profit. He gave us the perfect example of this focus, that godliness, not just to show us, but to fulfill it perfectly to give us that perfect record. And then he gave his life. He took the punishment our selfishness deserves and made the payment of his blood to pay our debts.

And, in doing so, he gives us life, real life, life begun in the waters of baptism, with an eternal inheritance; life lived in view of God the life giver; life strengthened by our time here and receiving the body and blood he gave as he gave us life. So Paul charges us to keep the command, to make the good confession Christ made – right up until he comes to take us home.

And when we see the God of Love we speak about, we won’t be able to help it. In our lives and in our words, we will be proclaiming God’s glory...like Paul. I love how when Paul gets going about what God has done for us, so many times, he can’t help but break out in one of these hymns of praise. Look at verse 15: **“God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 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.”**

How cool is that when your lives shout this “song of praise”? Or when our church shouts this “song of praise”? I’ve got to tell you - I thank you for putting me in the position to hear your “songs of praise” so often. You don’t know how many comments I am privileged to hear from people I’m visiting who have had contact with you. They speak of the love of God showing through you all in all that you did for them or others that showed your “songs of praise” to the God of Love. Or when they visited worship and you took the time to friendly welcome them and be of assistance to them. When our focus is on the one we speak about – we do things like that, and it shows.

We join in with Paul’s hymn of praise and our love speaks with focused heart. After all, we are not gathered together here at St. Luke’s or as a part of the WELS to “pay the bills” or “protect our stuff”, but we are a family united by the abiding grace of Jesus and our purpose, as St. Luke’s Evangelical Lutheran Church, and as children in God’s family is to: Worship in the Word, Walk by the Word, and Witness with the Word. Our purpose is to see God’s love, live God’s love and let God’s love speak in our words and actions. And when we do, our God will make sure we have everything we need to do it, regardless of all the fears and finances that Satan wants us to make church all about. So let’s keep our focus. In Christ, Amen