

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: *Hard Truth*
Service Theme: *Serve God with Money;*
You Can't Serve God and Money

Sermon Theme: *Godliness, Dollars, and Sense*
(September 18, 2022) 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19

2 weeks ago, our AC broke, so we called a repairman to fix it. Last Sunday, our daughter Maggie fell and gashed open her chin, so we took her to the ER to get patched up. On Thursday, we learned that the transmission in our minivan was shot, so we spent yesterday van shopping. I share those events in the lives of the Schreiners not to solicit your sympathy, but because they all have something in common. Things that were broken, and needed to be fixed? Yes. Frustrating things that make you want to cry? Absolutely! But most applicable to today's theme, all three occurrences were expensive reminders that money plays a big role our lives!

And I'd guess you've experienced similar reminders lately, or at least sometimes in your life. Love it or hate it; have lots of it or have little of it—you can't deny that money majorly impacts us. It makes sense then that God talks about it so often! I've never personally counted, but I've heard that there are over 2,300 Bible passages that talk about money. I'd guess God inspired the writers of the Bible to spill so much ink about money, not only because it's an important thing in our lives, but because Satan easily convinces people that money is the most important thing in their lives!

Satan is also masterful at getting people to overcorrect their steering to avoid the ditch on one side: loving money more than anything else, that they end up in the ditch on the other side: Seeing money as the worst evil we should avoid at all costs.

So what's the middle road? Whether you have lots of money, little money, or somewhere in between, through his Word, God steers us to

properly understand the intersection of **Godliness, Dollars, and Sense.**

That misunderstanding was why the Apostle Paul included his encouragement just before our sermon text in his first letter to his young friend, colleague, and protégé, pastor Timothy. In the Christian church at Ephesus, which Paul planted, and Timothy now pastored, some Christians believed *“that godliness is a means to financial gain.”*

They assumed that being Christians meant God would reward them with great wealth. That's how it worked in other religions after all. If you prayed to the gods, offered them sacrifices, and worshiped at their temples, they would reward you with bountiful harvests, fruitful herds, or prosperous business. Basically, they lived under the formula, **Godliness= Great Gain.** But that mindset made their faith nothing more than a means to what they really wanted—money.

Some Christians today still think that way. If they don't have the financial means they desire, they're filled either with anger that God's not rewarding them like they deserve, or with guilt, assuming God must be punishing them for some sin they've committed, or for having a weak faith, by withholding wealth.

The secular world follows a slightly different formula: **Self-sufficiency= Great Gain.** The Greek word, *autárkeia*, means “contentment,” but literally, it means, “self-sufficiency.” That's a pretty good descriptor of how the world lives, in two ways.

First, that formula makes the primary goal of life to acquire as much “great gain”—as much wealth, possessions, and comfort for ourselves as possible during the days of our life. And second, that formula engrains the idea that we can achieve that goal apart from God. By your hard work, drive, and skills, you yourself can gain enough wealth to live a life filled with meaning, satisfaction, and peace.

And that formula doesn't exactly promote contentment, does it? How many business books tell you, “Be content with the size of your company!” or “Be content with your income level!” No, they preach

that you need to keep driving, growing, climbing, and pushing to have more, bigger, and better! That contentment hinders reaching your goals!

That's why Paul's formula—God's formula—is so counter-cultural. He marries those two formulas together, making them exponentially truer. Paul writes, ***“But godliness with contentment is great gain.”*** That's the overarching formula for how Christians should view and treat money. ***Godliness + Contentment = Great Gain.*** Those Christians didn't have the right formula, because being a Christian doesn't guarantee physical “great gain.” But as we'll see, that doesn't mean God doesn't love us—because his great gain is even greater!

And the world's formula doesn't work either. Because contentment, in the secular sense of “self-sufficiency” doesn't give great gain, at least, not great gain in God's eyes. Just take it from King Solomon. Considered one of the wealthiest men who ever lived, Solomon pointed out in Ecclesiastes, being “self-sufficient” apart from God doesn't give you a life of meaning, identity, satisfaction, and peace. ***“Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income. This too is meaningless. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them? As for the rich, their abundance permits them no sleep.”*** As Solomon spoke from experience, living in a self-sufficient pursuit of wealth apart from God actually makes life meaningless, unsatisfying, and restless.

But when Paul attaches godliness-- that is, trusting in, serving, and living for God—to “contentment,” the meaning changes. Instead of self-sufficiency, contentment plus godliness means being completely satisfied with whatever circumstances God wills for your life as you live for him. That means we don't love and serve God for the pursuit of wealth, or separate from God for the pursuit of wealth. Rather, we can simply love and serve God because through him, we already have the greatest possible gain! Not self-sufficiency, but soul-sufficiency!

And Paul points out why we can have that kind of contentment. First, ***“We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.”*** Paul echoes Solomon in Ecclesiastes, who's echoing Job after he

heartbreakingly lost everything. ***“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart.”*** As the old cliché goes, you can't take it with you. And that means we can be content with what we have, or don't have in this life, because it's all temporary anyways. It'll all break down, run out, or fail to satisfy; or we'll die, and all of it becomes valueless!

And because everything is temporary, we can be content and satisfied when God simply supplies our needs. As Paul writes, ***“But if we have food and clothing,”*** literally, nourishment and covering, ***“we will be content with that.”*** That's not the formula the world lives by, but if God provides us with the basic necessities we need to live, we can be perfectly content. And let's face it, God gives us far more than the bare necessities!

We can be content when God supplies what we need to live, because he's given us our lives for one purpose—to glorify him, and to proclaim the good news of Jesus to others. That's why God's formula fits. If we have God, and a life lived in faith in him, we can be perfectly content and satisfied with our circumstances, because through Jesus, God has given us the “greatest gain.” Even greater than a life full of earthly wealth is an eternity of heavenly treasure! That can't be stolen by thieves, or undercut by inflation and crashing economies!

But that's not the formula the world subscribes to. And it's not always the formula our hearts want to follow either. I once preached a sermon on money, and a man came up after the service and said, “Good sermon, but it didn't apply to me. I don't have any money!” But after Paul lays out the formula for godliness and contentment, Paul gives direction not just to the wealthy, but also to ***“Those who want to get rich.”***

Paul warns, ***“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. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”*** As we said, Satan excels at convincing people to view money as the

most important thing in their life—the thing worth pursuing at the cost of everything else, even your soul! And when self-sufficiency in the pursuit of great gain takes the place of godliness plus contentment, the result is deadly.

Whether by sinful practices to make more money, or by pushing their faith to the periphery to prioritize chasing more money, when someone makes money their god, it's so easy to wander from faith in the true God. It's possible to have outward, visible earthly “great gain,” to look like you're rising, climbing, driving-- without realizing you're actually plunging into eternal ruin and destruction.

So, while some people might question, or even get angry with God for not giving them more physical wealth, could it be that God knows physical wealth would make you spiritually poor? Could it be that God loves you enough to ensure you have the kind of eternal wealth that you really need, instead of the physical wealth that can lead to so much destruction? That requires us to trust that godliness + contentment brings the greatest gain!

But that might tempt us to think that wealth and money is evil. Maybe we should quit our jobs, move out to a commune somewhere, and be freed from the ills of money. I say that tongue in cheek, but there really are wealthy Christians who carry a burden of guilt, as if they're dirty sinners because they have physical wealth. Should they?

You've probably heard people deride the evil of money saying, ***“Money is the root of all evil.”*** But that's not what Paul says! He writes, ***“The LOVE of money is a root of all kinds of evil.”*** Does Satan use wealth to tempt those who are wealthy? Of course! That's why Paul warns, ***“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God.”***

But while we can't serve money as our lord, we can use our money to serve our Lord! Paul says ***“God...richly provide us with everything for our enjoyment.”*** Money, wealth, and the things we can buy with that money doesn't come from self-sufficiency, but from God—for our

enjoyment! So don't feel guilty for having wealth, or enjoy the blessings that it can bring! It's given to you by God.

But don't let it become your god. Rather, use your great gain for an even greater gain in serving God! If God has blessed you with great physical wealth, or any physical wealth, use it with godliness and contentment to serve the one who gave it to you. As Paul encourages, ***“Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”***

As Solomon said, a life lived apart from God is ultimately meaningless. But a life lived with godliness and contentment has eternal meaning! We said before “you can't take it with you.” And that's true. The only thing you can take with you to heaven is...other people. And when we use the money God's given to us to serve him, we tap into the only kinds of purpose and meaning that produce eternal results.

Whether it's giving offerings to support the work of the church, and to help spread the gospel at home and around the world; whether it's sharing some of your blessings to care for others in need as a way of being the face of Jesus to someone; if you use the earthly treasure God has given you to glorify and serve him, you lay up heavenly treasure. You take hold of the life that is truly life.

That's the intersection of faith and money. Whether we have lots of money, or not much money: Godliness—living to glorify God; plus contentment—total satisfaction with whatever circumstances God has given to you; equals great gain. Maybe not the physical wealth or power that the world chases. But because our hope is found not in money, but in the Savior who paid the ultimate price to purchase us from sin—we possess the greatest gain, the treasure that never runs out. Eternal life that makes us incomparably wealthy in this life, and in the life to come.