

Take Hold of that Which is Truly Life

Two Ways for the Wealthy to Worship God

1 Timothy 6:17-19

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Introduction

Can you actually worship God if you are wealthy? I don't want to be a hypocrite when I sing "riches I heed not." And I wonder if I worship wealth since I spend much of my time at work.

Our sermon series is in 1 Timothy, and earlier in 1 Timothy 6:9-10 we read:

*9 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. 10 For **the love of money** is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6:9-10)*

So for those who are rich, how can we make sure that we don't love money? There's a story right after a famous passage where Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me." Jesus met a Rich Young Man, who ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus first asked him why he called him Good. Only God is good. Jesus then answered him by listing off some of the Ten Commandments. The Rich Young Man replied, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth."

Look at what Jesus says:

*21 And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, "You lack one thing: go, **sell all that you have** and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 **Disheartened** by the saying, he went away **sorrowful**, for he had **great possessions**. (Mark 10:21-22)*

The Rich Young Man was said to be disheartened. He went away sorrowful. I wonder how much money I can keep for myself. Does Jesus actually mean for us to sell all that we have and give to the poor?

Context

Our passage today is directed towards those who are rich:

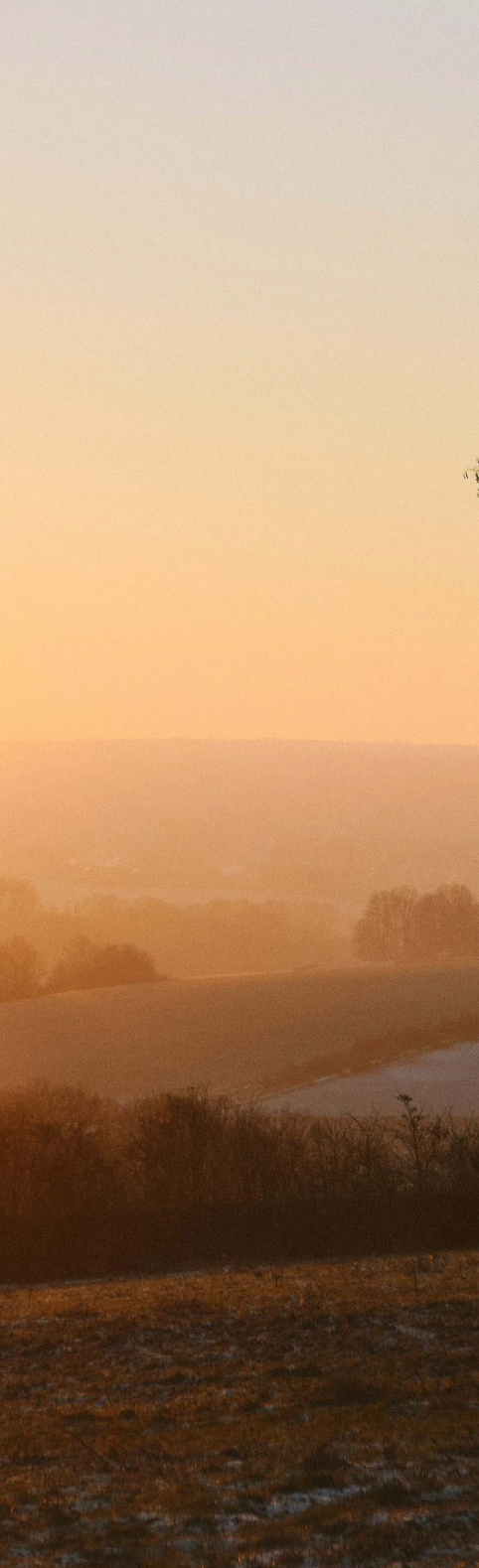
*17 **As for the rich in this present age**, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)*

Some of you may say you are not rich, so this passage does not apply to you. I would first say that you are rich if you have more than your basic needs of food and shelter and clothing to be content – something Paul actually mentioned earlier in the text. I would also say that compared to Paul’s original audience, we are ridiculously rich, even embarrassingly so. Finally, I would say that if you say it does not apply to you now – that doesn’t mean that it won’t apply to you in the future. So now you actually have no excuse for when you are making money. Allow this sermon to shape how you use and view your money on the future.

1 Timothy combats the false teachers, and Paul would be correcting their wrong view of wealth and speak against their greed. Notice that Paul clarifies he is speaking to those who are rich in this present age. Paul is preparing to end his letter, and he’s directing the gaze of his audience upwards towards God in Heaven. We’re going to see “this present age” to a future age, a coming age – meaning Heaven on the horizon.

Sermon Preview

As Christians, we believe that all of life is worship. You are either worshiping God, or you are worshiping something or someone else. Our sermon will show two ways for the wealthy to worship God. Let’s get started.



1. Set Your Hope on God

The first way for the wealthy to worship God is to set your hope on God:

*17 As for the rich in this present age, **charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.** 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)*

We are to set our hope on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. That's some clever wordplay by Paul: If you are rich, God is richer – and he richly provides us with everything. You are not rich on your own. That is why Paul says not to be haughty or boastful. It's dangerous to think of yourself highly, or wise in your own eyes. There is an arrogance in riches that is an affront to God. We say things like "This is the money I made." We attribute to ourselves a false sense of importance! At the end of the day, you provide nothing for yourself. God is the provider; don't be prideful. Look at how Paul says that God richly provides us with everything to enjoy. He didn't have to add that – of course we're going to enjoy what we have. But Paul does not mean to guilt-trip the rich in this world, he's reminding them and giving them reason to rejoice. God is generous and good. Your wealth should lead you to worship God – not your money or yourself.

There's a particular phrase we need to tackle – the uncertainty of riches. One Bible scholar says that "wealth is precarious to trust," (Kostenberger) pointing out that the word for uncertainty only occurs here in the New Testament. You can't be sure with riches. They will trick you. Think about the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13:22, which says: "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the *deceitfulness of riches* choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." Riches can deceive you in such a way that it blocks the word from working in your life. This is incredibly dangerous.

Resolve to See the Reality of Riches

So, will you resolve to see the reality of riches? Will you see what is actually true about money, and what lies we might believe? You might think that if we have more money, we can buy more stuff, and this will make us happier or more fulfilled. This is a lie. Jesus says in Luke 12:15: “One’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Those who have Jesus have the deepest joy and most fulfilling life available in this world. You might think that once you start making money, it’s yours to spend however you want. This is a lie. Jesus says in Luke 14:33: “Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” Renounce is a very strong word. You must reject it. You must abandon it. Those who claim Christ must hand over everything to him – including your money. You might think that your worth or value or even your identity is tied to money, and if God loves you then you will be rich. That is a lie. Proverbs 22:2 says: The rich and the poor meet together; the LORD is the Maker of them all.” How much money you make or how much money you have is not a matter to God – but it’s how you give back to God what you have been given. If you can see the reality of riches, it will help you to set your hope in God, and not in money. Constantly examine your thoughts and beliefs about money. Reject the lies and go back to the truth of God’s word.

Let me give you an example from my life. You know that I like to mention books in my sermons. Today I want to talk about books in general. I love books. Books are good. But there was a time where I can remember being greedy to get more books. I saw books as a symbol of status and of wealth. This is a lie. I started accumulating books, and to be honest I have an embarrassing amount of books in my possession. This is not a humble brag. It is humiliating because I haven’t even read all of them. There’s really no point to them. They just take up space. I saw the reality behind my riches – books are just paper. And so while I am happy to read, I now reject the lie that my having more possessions – books in my case – will make me happy or more fulfilled.



2. Store Up Treasures in Heaven

The second way for the wealthy to worship God is to store up treasures in Heaven:

17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

This is what I was talking about in our introduction: There is a present age, but there is a future, coming age with Heaven on the horizon. You cannot take your earthly wealth with you to Heaven. What you can do is store up treasure that will last forever – riches that will endure. These are the rewards of doing good, being rich in good works, and being generous and ready to share. We can go through these quickly. There is much good you can do with your money – we’re not just meant to store it in a shed, laid up in a barn (Luke 12:21). To be rich in good works, another play on words, means to abound or be abundant in good works – doing things that are actually profitable for people (Titus 3:8) and providing help in cases of urgent need and to be fruitful with your money (Titus 3:14). Being generous and ready to share does not just mean using money for your friends and family, but contributing to the needs of all the saints and seeking to show hospitality to everyone (Rom 12:13).

There’s another particular phrase I want us to examine – storing up treasure as a good foundation for the future. This is about making eternal investments. This is about making a powerful impact for the kingdom. Think about what Jesus says during his famous Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:19: 19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Whatever money you make here on earth will not last. Your wealth will reveal where your heart is – and it will either be tied up here on earth or making deposits into Heaven.

Resolve to Make Eternal Investments

So, will you resolve to make eternal investments? The only way to invest in the future is to give in the present. While there is room for spontaneous giving, real investment takes purposeful planning. Give your money. Give your time. Give your talents. Give *yourself*. Godliness is expressed in generosity. Our giving should not be stingy. It should not be half-hearted. 1 Timothy 1:14 says: “And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” Our giving should overflow for others, just as God’s grace overflows to us. We give happily and heartily. One Bible scholar says: “Rich believers turn a potential spiritual liability into an advantage by sharing some of what they have with those who are in need.” (Kostenberger) I challenge you to give as much as you possibly can. I challenge you to give until it actually hurts you. Those who give to the glory of God should not worry. Philippians 4:19 says: “And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.” Christ will return, or you will meet him in Heaven, and he will ask you what you did with what he gave you. My prayer is that as God gives you more resources to steward, you will make bigger and bolder deposits for the kingdom.

Let me give you an example from my life. Let’s talk about evangelism and discipleship. I am grateful that our church emphasizes evangelism and discipleship. Evangelism especially with your family and friends is one way to make eternal investments. Some people already know the gospel, but they don’t believe. You can spend time with them and continue to be a light to them. Think about your counselors – and I specifically want to highlight those who serve without pay, those who are not a part of the church staff, those who we would consider volunteers. They are making eternal investments by giving time and energy to you. Some of them have been following you throughout the course of your entire education, maybe from junior high to your senior year. I have seen generations of eternal investments – aunts and uncles have invested in me, and I have taught their children, and some of their children are now teaching my children. It takes money, time, talents, and giving yourself to make disciples. There is nothing like presenting mature believers to the Lord. I am grateful for those who have made eternal investments by evangelizing and discipling me. And I hope to follow their example, and spur you on as well to see the good that comes when you give.

The Gospel

I want us to pause at the last phrase in our passage:

*17 As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, **so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.** (1 Timothy 6:17-19)*

What is true life? It is the promise of life in Christ Jesus (2 Tim 1:1). The Bible is blunt – those who do not know Jesus are dead in their trespasses and sins. But there is Good News:

*9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that **though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.** (2 Corinthians 8:9)*

When Jesus was speaking to the Rich Young Ruler, he didn't ask him to do something he hadn't already done. Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He owns everything. Everything belongs to him. He claims absolute authority over all. He gave up everything to the poor – to people like you and me – so that we might become rich. Our poorness does not derive from our lack of money. I'm speaking about our depravity. Our poorness is in terms of our spiritual bankruptcy. Admit that you are a sinner, that you are a rebel to God's will. Believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the cross for your sins. Confess him as the resurrected King and Lord over your life. Follow him here on earth and you will follow him up into Heaven. You will be adopted into God's family, and all the riches that belong to God will be yours. But most importantly, you will be rich because you will have Jesus as your own treasure. You will love him, and you will find eternal life with him.



Big Idea

Wealthy Christians worship by setting their hope on God and storing up treasures in Heaven.

Luke 12:21 exhorts Christians to be rich toward God, and I think this is a great way to grasp the meaning of our text today. Be rich toward God. Take your eyes off of this earth and get your gaze up toward God. Store up treasures in Heaven by directing your dollars and everything that you do up toward God. Be rich toward God.

Conclusion

Let's go back to the beginning again for our conclusion. I asked you: Can you actually worship God if you are wealthy? The answer is yes, you can worship God if you are wealthy. Wealthy Christians worship by setting their hope on God and storing up treasures in Heaven. Real believers know that Christ is the prize. God's children trust not in wealth or in themselves – but in their Heavenly Father who faithfully provides. The way we steward our wealth shows what we love. Money is not an end in itself – but it is a means to worship and serves as a witness to others. We use our money to make eternal investments and show our hope with God in Heaven.

When Jesus spoke with the Rich Young Man, he was revealing what had taken hold of his heart. The man relied on his wealth and his self-righteousness to inherit eternal life. Unlike the children who Jesus told to let come to him, with nothing of their own to give, this Rich Young Man thought he had something to offer. Jesus questioned him about calling him God because he really was not ready to acknowledge Jesus as God. He could not obey and give away what he had. He had been exposed, and was blind to see that he couldn't possibly have kept the other commandments as well. He fell short of the first commandment, to have no other gods before God. Money had become his god. When you put God first, you actually don't have to sell all that you have – you'll learn you have to steward it well for God and his glory. The Rich Young Man did not, could not, repent. You have the opportunity to make things right with God the Father and forsake your love of money now. You can do this. Nothing is impossible with God.

After Jesus spoke with the Rich Young Man, he looked around and said to his disciples:

*29 Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, 30 who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, **and in the age to come eternal life.**" (Mark 10:29-30)*

For those who are rich in this world, in this present age – there is an age to come. If you give everything to God – you will receive eternal life. Hear these two short yet powerful parables:

*44 "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then **in his joy** he goes and **sells all that he has** and buys that field. 45 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on **finding one pearl of great value**, went and **sold all that he had** and bought it. (Matthew 13:44-46)*

My brothers and sisters, you lose nothing when you give your life, yourself, your money to God. It's just paper. Heaven is our home. Unlike the Rich Young Man, you will not go away sad. You will not go away sorrowful. You can sell all of your great possessions and go away with joy when you find Jesus, the one pearl of great value. I can still head off to work while my heart clings to Christ. The more I think about it, the more I realize it's not about how much money I can keep for myself. It's now about how much more can I give to God. You gain everything when you have the Gospel. "Riches I heed not nor man's empty praise. Thou mine inheritance now and always. Thou and thou only first in my heart. High King of Heaven, my treasure thou art."



Rich by His Grace

The wealthy in this world
Are beggars next to Christ
The poor he makes rich by his grace
And gives to them true life

While money is deceiving
And never seems enough
In Jesus Christ, I'm satisfied
In him I hope and trust

The treasures on this earth
That moth and rust destroy
I give away with Heaven's aims
And get eternal joy

I let go of the world
Raise open hands to Christ
The poor he makes rich by his grace
And gives to them true life

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