

September 18, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

### **The secret to contentment.**

He deserved to be punished. According to Greek mythology, a demigod (half human, half god) named Tantalus disobeyed his father, Zeus. So, Zeus sentenced him to stay standing in a pool of water. The water could get quite high, even up to his chin, but every time Tantalus bent over to get a drink, the water quickly drained and remained out of his reach. Hanging over him were trees with ripe fruit, but every time Tantalus reached up for a piece of fruit, the wind would instantly blow the branch away. Food and drink were very close to Tantalus, but were always just out of his reach. That's how we got the word "tantalizing." It refers to an object of desire that is just beyond our reach.

Tantalus sounds like most of the people in the world. They are always eager for something more, but can never quite grasp peace or satisfaction. The are not content. The same was true of the members of the church where Pastor Timothy served. Neither the rich nor the poor were content. They all wanted more. Their greed for more money was starting to ruin their relationship with God. The young pastor reached out to his old professor for encouragement and guidance. Professor Paul then wrote a letter to Pastor Timothy which we know today as 1 Timothy.

Paul explained (:9), **"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."** How many crimes have been committed because someone wanted more money? How many marriages and families and friendships have been torn apart because of squabbles over money? How many people have destroyed themselves by gambling? Verse 10 is one of the most misquoted passages in the Bible. People often say, "Money is the root of all evil." But that's not what Paul wrote. He said (:10), **"The LOVE of money is a root of all kinds of evil."** It's the greedy desire, the coveting, of money that causes all sorts of trouble. Money, by itself, is a good thing. It's greed that is bad.

The LOVE of money also puts our salvation in jeopardy. Paul continued (:10), **"Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."** If you are pierced with an arrow, you are hurt and dying. I have never seen anyone bow down to a dollar bill and pray to it, but I have seen people so obsessed with getting more and more money that they became selfish and cold-hearted. They ended up pushing Jesus out of their hearts. They would never miss a day of work, but

they'll stay away from church. When people are not connected to Word and Sacrament, their faith gets weaker and weaker until it dies. Just because someone knows about Jesus and what he did does not mean that they have saving faith in him. The LOVE of money is a serious danger that can destroy faith. We need this warning that having more money is not always a blessing.

It's so easy to think that if we had just have a little more money, if we can just buy that one extra thing, then we'll be happy and content. But even when we do get more money, or buy that extra thing, we still want MORE. The things that thrilled us when we first bought them are now collecting dust as junk. Some people get such an emotional rush of excitement with buying something that they end up with a shopping addiction and ruin themselves with compulsive buying, even if it's just junk from a garage sale. Every advertisement is designed to tell you, **"If you just buy our product, then your life will be better and you'll be happy."** The whole lottery system plays on people's greed as they waste their money hoping to get rich quick. Studies have shown that even those very, very, very few who do get rich quick by winning the lottery do not end up happy. Money can not buy happiness.

Money can also give us a false sense of security. If we have enough money in our bank account and investments, then we feel safe and secure. And suddenly, we are not turning to the Lord and trusting in him for all we need. You do not need to be rich to make money an idol in your heart. The poor can also fixate on it. Paul told Pastor Timothy to tell his members not to (:17), **"put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain."** An accident, a stock market crash, a costly illness, or something else can quickly wipe out a lifetime's worth of savings. Money does not guarantee us security.

We need to recognize and admit that the love of money also lives in all of our hearts. Certainly, we want to be good stewards of our money – not wasting it, saving some for the proverbial "rainy day," planning for retirement, etc. Yet, there have been times when all of us have wasted money on something we should not have bought. There have been times when we have been jealous of others who have more money and material blessings than we have. Rising inflation has filled us with a bit of fear. We fret and worry as if God is unable to provide us with our daily bread. The same Lord who has provided us with wealth, also sometimes blesses us with a bit of poverty to teach us to keep our priorities straight.

Three weeks ago, a Mickey Mantle baseball card from 1952 sold for a jaw-dropping price of \$12,600,000. It became the world's most valuable sports collectible. A baseball card is just a thin piece of cardboard with some printing on it. But because that Mickey Mantle card is so

unique, people were willing to spend a lot of money on it. The point here is that the real value of something depends on how much someone is willing to pay for it.

You and I and our portfolios do not look that valuable to the people of our world. We do not live in extravagant mansions with hired servants waiting on us. All the chemicals that make up our body are only worth a few hundred dollars. As an alien in one Star Trek episode put it, “Humans are ugly bags of mostly water.” But remember, the real value of something depends on how much someone is willing to pay for it. Jesus says that you are worth dying for. Before the Lord even started creating our world, he looked into the future and fell in love with you. He made sure to put you in the right place at the right time with the right set of circumstances so that you would come into contact with the great good news of salvation. Through that message, the Holy Spirit performed a miracle inside your heart. He turned you into a believer. May we never get bored of knowing that God has performed a miracle in each one of your hearts. He has given you individual attention.

When Queen Elisabeth II died, she had a net worth of \$600 billion. Still, she died and had to stand before the Lord just like each of us. Worldly wealth does not count for anything when we stand before God. As Paul explained (:7), “**We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.**” Some people have more money than we do. So what? We have what we need. In the end, it does not matter how much money you have. What matters is your connection to Jesus.

Jesus was tempted with greed when the Devil offered him all the riches of the world. Jesus was thinking of you as he dismissed the Devil’s offer and kept his Heavenly Father in first place in his heart. Jesus was thinking of you as his pure, precious, priceless blood was dripping out of his body as he hung on the cross. Jesus dedicated his whole life to serving you and was willing to die for you. He has given you gifts that kings would covet. He has given you a clean conscience. He has wrapped his robe of righteousness around you. He has filled your heart with joy to know that you are loved. He has guaranteed you life after death in a city where gold is so worthless they use it to pave the streets. When you stand before the Lord, he will place the crown of life on your head. That’s why King David could write in Psalm 23, “**The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.**” Or, in Psalm 34, “**Those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.**” When you have Jesus as your Savior, you have all you need. Someone wise once said, “I am not rich, but I am richly blessed.”

Money, by itself, is not evil. In fact, it is good. God is the one who put gold and silver and nickel and copper and other precious metals in the earth he

created. The Lord is the one who gave us the skills, opportunities and ambition to hold a job and earn money. Paul explained that those who do have money should (:18), “**be rich in good deeds, and be generous and willing to share.**” We use money to do good things such as provide food, clothing and shelter for us and our families. With money we are able to pay taxes so our government can protect us and maintain law and order. With money we are able to support the gospel ministry so that we and our children stay connected to Jesus, not to mention supporting mission work around the world. With money we are able to help the less fortunate. What a joy to know that the Lord is using us to help others.

Paul said that those who use their money to help others will (:19), “**lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they make take hold of the life that is truly life.**” Paul is certainly not saying that you can earn your way into heaven by helping other people with your money. He is saying that when you keep your priorities straight, when you look to Jesus for all you need instead of trusting in your money, when you have Jesus as number one in your heart and when you control your money instead of letting it control you, then – along with all believers – you will end up in heaven. Life as a Christian is truly life that will last forever. Your faith is so much more valuable than any worldly riches. Paul explained (:6), “**Godliness (faith) with contentment is great gain.**” You have more than some of the world’s richest people. They are not satisfied with what they have and always want more. But you are just fine with what God had given you. As Paul said, “**If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.**”

The secret to contentment is really no secret. Instead of always trying to grasp for something more that is just out of your reach, like Tantalus, focus on what God has already given you. You have God’s undivided attention. You have angel escorts.. You have heaven. You have Jesus as your Savior. Who could wish for anything more valuable? Amen.