

## **The Bible Doesn't Say That: Money is the Root of all Evil** **Matthew 6:19-21     1Tim.6:6-10**

For one Sunday I'm returning to the series, "The Bible doesn't say that." Remember that series? I had one more message I wanted to give, holding off until now—partly because we're reading from two parts of Matthew 6, this morning, and next Sunday, and partly because this might serve as a pre-stewardship season stewardship reminder for us as we head into fall, when we typically ask for financial support, pledges, etc, for the coming year.

So, this morning we're looking at the quote "Money is the root of all evil." As we shall see, this is a simple misquote of Paul's words to his young apprentice Timothy. See if you catch the misquote as you hear this passage.

I'm reading from Paul's first letter to Timothy, and we're picking up at verse 6 of chapter 6—the first 5 verses are an encouragement to Timothy to keep to the sound teaching of Jesus, because there were those back in the day, prosperity gospel preachers, who used the gospel as a means to acquire wealth, and did so usually by mangling Jesus' teaching in such a way that it suckered people into giving them money. The line Paul uses is that "they imagine that godliness is a means of gain."

Note: Godliness is not a *means* to *anything*. Godliness is a *response...* to the goodness of God, and to God's grace in our lives. It's a response to the invitation to follow Jesus. It's a way of giving God our love, and our heart. But... I'm getting ahead of myself! After saying that the prosperity gospel money grubbers imagine that godliness is a means of gain, here is what he says next...

## 1 Timothy 6:6-10

<sup>6</sup>Of course, there *is* great gain in godliness combined with contentment; <sup>7</sup>for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; <sup>8</sup>but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. <sup>9</sup>But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup>For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

This is the word of the Lord!

Did you catch the misquote?

This verse is misquoted in two ways. One, we might typically hear the phrase misquoted as “*money* is the root of all evil” but it's actually “the love of money...” And second, even if we know that it's ‘love of money’ and not just ‘money,’ it is often quoted as saying that the love of money is “the root of all evil.” I have heard it said that way and have often said it that way myself. But what it actually says is that love of money is “a” root of “all kinds of” evil. Subtle

difference, but important. “The love of money is *a* root of *all kinds of* evil.” So, love of money isn’t the only source of every evil out there. There are other sources/roots of evil. However, *love* of money can cause all kinds of trouble—Paul is pretty clear about that.

Love of money can indeed be a source of all kinds of trouble, and yet, money can be a source of all kinds of *good*, and we need to keep that in mind as well. We’ll talk about that as we go along.

Did you know... that of all the things Jesus taught about, told parables about, and interacted with people about, money and possessions were his most oft talked about topic? By a wide margin. A British scholar named FF Bruce did an analysis of this, and actually produced some statistics on what Jesus talked about topically, and discovered that money and possessions were far and above his most consistent teaching and conversation topic. A full one third of his parables and other teachings were about money and possessions.

Sometimes he taught about it out of the blue (like in our Matthew passage, which is just one small nugget of instruction on money and possessions in a lengthier teaching on it from the Sermon on the Mount), and some of it came as a result of an encounter with a person—like the rich young man, to whom Jesus said, “Sell what you have and give to the poor” and the guy went away sad. And

Jesus took this teachable moment to tell his disciples how hard it is for someone who loves money and possessions to truly and fully participate in the kingdom of heaven.

So, Jesus talked about money and possessions more than anything else. You can almost see the disciples rolling their eyes and groaning, “Ugh, this again! He’s talking about treasure.”

Well, there’s a good reason he repeats himself. It’s because he cares. And because he wants our heart to be in the right place, with respect to God and to the world. That’s why Jesus says in Matt 6: “Don’t store up treasures that rot; store up relational and spiritual treasure. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be.” God wants our treasure because he wants our heart, our love, our attention and affection. That’s Paul’s point too: love of \$ takes our heart away; our love, our attention and devotion.

Jesus knows how powerful money & possessions are in a person’s life, so much so he says that wherever the treasure goes, the heart goes, and not the other way around. He didn’t say “wherever your heart goes, there your treasure will be.” He knows that just isn’t true, most of the time. *Sometimes* where our heart goes, our treasure follows, but generally that isn’t the case.

For example, we can be deeply, emotionally moved by a tv commercial begging us to give money to a shelter for horribly abused and neglected dogs and cats (have you seen those ads? With sad violin music playing, tugging at our heart-strings), and we can cry our eyes out when we see the images of these poor animals (there goes our heart), but our treasure doesn't necessarily follow. I've shed a few tears over seeing poor neglected and abused animals on television, but I've never sent them money. My heart went there, but not my treasure (at least not in response to those tv commercials).

Conversely, however, if we put our treasure somewhere, our heart will go there. For example, if your treasure is in your kid's college tuition, your heart will go there! You're checking in. Or if your treasure is in the stock market, you are checking to see the thousands of dollars you're losing! Then gaining back. Then losing again.

So, Jesus is wise here. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be. So, he says put your treasure into something that lasts, something that blesses others and contributes to God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. So that your heart will be rightly related to the right things and the right people; mostly to the Lord of all good, the generous God from whom all blessings flow.

And I'd like us to notice that neither Jesus nor the apostle Paul say, "*People who have money are the source of all kinds of evil.*" Neither Jesus nor any of the New Testament writers condemn wealth or persons who possess wealth. Because money and possessions can be a source of blessing, and of good. So, there is never a condemnation of persons or of wealth by Jesus or Paul. They do tell us there are special challenges that come with gaining wealth. That's another reason why Jesus talked about money and possessions more than anything. Because he knows that money is powerful and can affect the human heart powerfully, so there is a special vigilance that needs to accompany the accumulation of wealth (as way of guarding our hearts).

That's why Jesus is pastoral whenever he talks about money and wealth; never scolding. For example, I mentioned Jesus' interaction with the rich young man. One small line that we easily miss in that encounter is that it says, "*Jesus looked at him and loved him,* and said to him, "Sell what you have..." Jesus didn't condemn him or rebuke him, but looked on him with compassion and love. He cared about his heart.

Paul is likewise pastoral here in 1Timothy. He is concerned that those who love money, and want to get rich, are often tempted to wander away from faith. Paul doesn't say, "Those who want to get rich are evil." No, he is saying that the

temptation is there to wander from the faith, and thus inflict pain on others, *and on ourselves*. So this is a compassionate word, not a word of judgment. And it's insightful because he says that love of money and pursuit of wealth causes self-inflicted wounds. It can plunge people into ruin, he says.

Similarly, Jesus never condemns wealth, but warns about the hazards to a person's soul if they aren't aware of what money can do to them, and if there isn't a plan to do something useful and edifying with what we have.

Another thing to notice, because it's the love of money which is a root of all kinds of evil, and not "*money is the root of all kinds of evil,*" is that means it's a matter of *heart and attitude* toward money, and not money itself. Money is neutral. This means that *any* human being is susceptible to greed, and needs to keep guard against it. Greed is no respecter of persons. Just because someone is poor doesn't mean that they *don't* love money. Or because someone is well off it means that they do love it. *We all* have to be on guard against it.

Because money is powerful. Yet, money is simply a tool in our toolbox if you think about it. It's a tool to use. But like any powerful tool, we need to know how to use it properly and safely. We don't just give a power tool to someone without instruction and training about how to use it.

This is why the authors of that wonderful book, *When helping Hurts* say that sometimes the worst thing we can do for someone who is poor is just give them money; if they have not had the relationships with people to help them understand what money is, and how to use money wisely and beneficially, then the probability is high that they will spend it unwisely or on harmful things and they'll end up *worse* off.

Money is a tool. A powerful tool, yes, but it's a tool that is essentially neutral. It can be used for good or bad, to help or to hurt; it can bless others, or be kept selfishly. Again, this is why Jesus talked about it so much. Money isn't inherently bad. Or inherently good. It's simply a tool. It just is.

But of all the tools in our toolbox to use, it is probably the one that needs to be handled with the utmost thoughtfulness and care.

Problem with money, if a person loves it too much:

One, it's never enough. Here is another gem of wisdom from Ecclesiastes: Ecclesiastes 5:10, "One who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor they who loves abundance with its income." What he is saying is, it'll never be enough.

There is a myth that says if I just have more money, I'll have fewer worries. For most people, that is not true! To my observation more money causes *more*



worries for a lot of people. Because... you know, it might not be enough. Or, I might lose it somehow. It might go away.

A second problem, if a person loves money too much, is that it can harm relationships. This is one of the big self-inflicted wounds that Paul speaks of. Love of money or of accumulation can surpass love of family, love of neighbor, and love of God. This is Jesus' warning about wanting to store up treasures: it will cause a conflict of where our love and affection, our heart, our loyalty lies. How many stories have we heard about people who win the lottery and then end up in strife, their family is torn apart, people they hardly ever knew start hounding them and even accusing them of things in order to extract money from them, etc.

And it's not just people relationships that money affects; it's a relationship with God that can be affected; there can be spiritual ramifications.

What does the Bible say, as a way of having a healthy relationship with money? It's simple, but not easy:

Give everything to God, spiritually, and figuratively (and maybe literally!) and see what happens. Consistently turn everything in your life over to God and see what God does with it. Claim nothing as your own, and let God be God with it all. How many of you know the old hymn, "I Surrender All"? The first verse: "All

to Jesus I surrender, all to him I freely give. I will ever love and trust him, in his presence daily live. I surrender all..."

The hymn says "I surrender all" not "I surrender some:" *"Some to Jesus I surrender, some to him I freely give; I will sometimes love and trust him, sometimes in his presence live..."* That's silly, but often rings true for a lot of Christians. Again, it's easier said than done, but if we can find a way, spiritually, in our hearts, to surrender it all and see what God does, we may discover the kingdom blessings that Jesus talks about.

It's interesting how billionaire J.D. Rockefeller once answered the question, "How much money is enough?" His response was, "Just a little bit more." After he died, someone asked, "How much did he leave behind?" The answer: "All of it." As Paul says, death shrouds have no pockets: "We brought nothing with us into the world, we take nothing with us when we go."

In contrast, listen to the wisdom of holocaust survivor Corrie Ten Boom: "I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess." That's the blessed paradox of the gospel: when we give, we receive; when we lose, we gain.

Paul uses a great word here: contentment. Contentment is not having what you want, but wanting what you already have. Our contentment is based on

wanting what we already have (instead of having what we always want). Our contentment is based on giving everything over into God's hands, and thanking God for our needs being met, and seeing the abundance that surrounds us.

And, our contentment is based on God's care for us, the knowledge of God's provision and presence: Hebrews 13:5, "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for God himself has said, 'I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you.'" Again, do you hear how pastoral this is?

What it comes down to: where is our love, our affection, our commitment? Psalm 62:10: "if riches increase, do not set your heart on them." Set your hearts on the Lord, in whose presence we continually live, who is our great provider. Riches come and go, but not God. God is faithfully present, always.

Final pastoral encouragement from Jesus, and a little preview of next week's passage, and message:

Matthew 6:25, 33 (continuing & concluding his teaching about money and possessions in the sermon on the mount): "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, what you will drink, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air;

they neither sow nor reap nor gather in barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

But seek first the Kingdom of God, and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

If love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, then the positive Biblical side of that is: love of God and neighbor is the root of all kinds of good. With contentment & gratitude.

Take My Life and Let it Be Consecrated