

HOW TO BE REALLY RICH

Getting Giving | 1 Timothy 6:6-19

A Word to the Rich

Through the voice of the Apostle Paul, God once challenged a young pastor named Timothy to preach a particular sermon which, if it had a title, might have been labeled: *"How to Be Really Rich."* This is what he said in 1 Timothy 6: **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, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and 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 (1 Tim 6:6-19)**

If Timothy were trying to follow those same instructions today and speak to you and me, as Paul suggest, I think he'd have a pretty big problem right from the start. The problem is that few of us probably think of ourselves as all that RICH, at least in material terms. Now, I know that not all that many of us are living below the federal poverty line, which is \$31,000 for a household of five or \$13,000 for a household of one. Some of us may be there but, according to DuPage County records, 93% of us are above that line. A quick survey of our clothes and cars, our jewelry and technology, suggests that most of us are enjoying a standard of living higher than most people in history or in other nations of this world today. Yet we don't always feel rich, do we?

There was a time when being a "millionaire" was regarded as stunning. Today, there are 20 million households in America with a net worth of at least \$1 million.¹ As *Fast Company* Magazine reports: "For the average Joe, a garden-suburb mortgage, school tuition, an SUV in the garage, and spring break in Vail can make a six-figure salary feel like almost nothing. Meanwhile, it's impossible to escape the barrage of images of the Rich Life, Supersized for the American Century."² The new entry-level Ferrari starts at \$215,000.³ Vertu cell phones sell for a mere \$6,000 and go up to \$88,000. The top-end Johnnie Walker Blue Label scotch goes for \$450 a bottle. Now that's living rich!

Worldly Wealth Is Uncertain

Or is it? In the last fifty average U.S. household incomes have increased by 49%, corrected for inflation.⁴ Yet in the list of 20 Happiest Countries, Americans came in #19 – and that was the year before COVID struck!⁵ Most of us are better paid, fed, educated and entertained than ever. Yet anxiety,⁶ depression, opioid addiction and suicide rates are up – again and that was before the pandemic started. It's really bizarre: Our lifestyles are packed with more stuff, but we seem to feel emptier. We're consuming more but enjoying it less.⁷

Maybe this is part of what the Apostle Paul meant when he urged Timothy to talk to his congregation about the money thing: **Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain (1 Tim 6:17)**. I got to thinking about that statement. In what sense is wealth so uncertain? And then I thought, well for one thing, wealth is uncertain in its FLOW. It can be a mighty stream sometimes and, then, quite suddenly stop flowing or dry up to a trickle. And if I've built the house of my identity or security next to that stream, what do I do when it suddenly stops flowing?

Even where the income stream is fairly dependable, wealth (as the world defines it) is also uncertain in its FRUIT. It's cliché to say that money doesn't buy happiness, but it is true, isn't it? We've probably all known some very affluent people who were truly joyful people. But I've met many more for whom worldly wealth – the chase for it, the effort to maintain it, the distractions and destructions that come with it – had become bitter fruit indeed. As the Garden of Eden story tells us, one of the Serpent's biggest lies is that you can spell happiness, "M-O-R-E."

Maybe most importantly of all, worldly wealth is uncertain in its FORCE. How many people do you know whose wealth drove them right into the arms of God? It happens now and then. I know a couple who found themselves so blessed with material things that they started going to church just because they felt thankful and wanted to gain the spiritual wisdom to do the best with what they'd been given. But how many other stories can be told of folks who got financially fat and then faithless?

Jesus said that material wealth -- what he personified with the word "**mammon**" (Mat 6:4) -- is a spiritual FORCE. It can drive us to think of ourselves as the *Owner* of life, instead of God who is. It can drive us to forget the call to be *Stewards* of the Master and push us instead to bury more and more resources in ourselves, even leading us into a debtor's prison. Wealth can force out of our minds the reality that one day we'll all be *evaluated* for whether we acted in a good and faithful way with what we had, and not as the world tends to measure, by how much we have. There was a time when the word "Success" was used to describe the benevolent influence of someone's life. Today, you can be thought a success even if you give little of yourself away.

Jesus told a parable once about a rich man named Dives who, after his death, suddenly realized that he'd been on the wrong track in life (Luke 16:19-31). He'd been given so much but had ignored the plight of the poor on his doorstep. He'd pursued success without significance, comfort without charity. Burning in a hell of separation from God, Dives begged for the chance to return to the earth and give his brothers a message. In Jesus' story, God says no to this request, but I bet every one of us knows exactly what the message would have been – exactly what thousands of now-enlightened, but no longer living people would cry out to us from the grave about if only they had voice.

God Gives For Our Enjoyment

It would be this: **Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain...** in its flow and fruit and force. And then the message would go on – as it does go on through the words of St. Paul: **[Command them] to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. (1 Tim 6:17)**. Did you hear that last part? Did you hear the good news in that last part? Some people picture God as some celestial Scrooge on the balcony of heaven, some gray-bearded Grinch, irritated when people are partying it up in this life. But God's not like this.

The text says that God **richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment**. Like any decent Father, much less a heavenly one, God wants his kids to take pleasure in the possessions He has entrusted to them. The God of the Bible is the one who *commanded* Israel to throw feasts and parties. He's the one who commanded tithing -- in part to make sure that the widow and orphan succeeded too, but also so that there'd be a cash fund on hand to provide for regular celebrations. One of the reasons that Jesus so irritated the Pharisees was because he insisted on living it up now and then himself and kept talking about the kingdom of God in such non-stingy terms.

In summing up his mission on earth, Jesus said: **I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). I have taught you all that I have**, said Jesus to his disciples, **that my joy might be in you and your joy complete (John 15:11; 17:13)**. Jesus was saying here and many other places: **"God wants your life to be really rich!"** But here's the key part – one last key to financial freedom and a whole lot more. No matter what the televangelists may try to tell you: The richness God wants most to give you and me is not the worldly version of health, wealth, and prosperity.

Real richness comes from drawing closer and closer to God – and sometimes certain things have to go because they stand between us and God (Mark 10:21). Real richness is the contentment that comes from trusting God for daily bread -- and sometimes that requires begging God to help us with our addiction to all the Devil's Foodcake out there. In essence, Jesus calls us toward that rich joy that is truly HIS joy. It is the spiritual health, the heavenly wealth, the recession-proof prosperity that comes when, like Jesus himself, you have it all, but choose to give yourself away for the sake of others (Phil 2:5-7).

Getting Giving

Do you get giving? Do you know WHY you give? It's not for the tax break, right? It's not because you'd be embarrassed if you didn't put something into the envelope at the fundraiser or in the plate at church, right? It's not because you're guilty about all the other ways you spend money, is it? It's not because you're trying to tip God or buy His

approval? If I am ruthlessly honest with myself, I have to confess that I've probably given for all those reasons at one time or another. But as I quickly get older, and slowly get just a little bit more spiritually mature, my own giving – and I pray yours – is more and more motivated by some other impulses.

I give because I've been given so much and it seems a natural way to express the gratitude I feel. I give because I see other people who have needs that God has given me the power to address. I give because, in doing so, it moves me closer to God; I become a little bit more like Him. Just like Jesus said, every time I put my treasure where God is working, my heart comes stumbling behind (Luke 12:34). I give because I know that St. Paul was right: **The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10)** and I'm trying to break off the affair. Paul says that **Godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Tim 6:6)** and I just don't know how I'll ever find out if that's true until I learn to be more content with what I have instead of lusting for the Goddess More.

But there's one additional reason I'm trying to grow in my giving, as I know you are too. I don't know if you've ever visited the Forest Lawn Cemetery in Los Angeles. It's an amazing place, sometimes called "Disneyland for the Dead." You'll find all kinds of graves and memorials of celebrities there and, over the years, people have been buried there in the strangest of ways. One man had himself buried sitting up in his Cadillac with a cigar glued in his mouth. Observing the burial, a groundskeeper nearby was heard to mutter: "*Man, now that's really living!*"

I so badly don't want to be like that. As St. Paul observes: **We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it (1 Tim 6:7)**. I want to remember that it's not what I store up here that counts. I can't keep it anyway. And so I want to learn to hold it loosely. I want to learn to have **Faith, Hope, and Love** be my main treasure here because, as Paul also remarks, these alone **remain** (1 Cor 13) -- they are the only things that survive the grave and they are what our life in heaven will be ALL about, forevermore. And giving helps me prepare for eternity.

So that's why I've preached this sermon today. It's because I need it every bit as much as anyone. It's why I'm not scolding you but simply calling all of us to the glory for which we were made, when I dare in the name of Jesus Christ to: **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, who richly provides us with everything for our enJOYment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. [For] in this way [we] will lay up treasure for [our]selves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that [we] may take hold of the life that is truly life (1 Tim 6:17-19) *And be really rich...* as I think this follower of Jesus truly gets...**

[VIDEO TESTIMONY]

¹ <https://spendmenot.com/blog/what-percentage-of-americans-are-millionaires/>

² "How to Lead a Rich Life" *Fast Company*, Issue 68, February 19, 2003.

³ <https://www.thedrive.com/news/36466/2021-ferrari-portofino-m-the-entry-level-ferrari-gets-20-hp-a-boatload-of-safety-tech>

⁴ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/01/09/trends-in-income-and-wealth-inequality/>

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurabegleybloom/2021/03/19/the-20-happiest-countries-in-the-world-in-2021/?sh=39b7a12970a0>

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7441973/>

⁷ <https://www.inc.com/quora/money-wont-make-you-happy-heres-what-will-accordin.html>