

The Riches of Contentment

Call to Worship: Psalm 73:25-28

1st Scripture: Luke 12:13-21

2nd Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:3-10

Hymn Insert- *You are My All in All*

Hymn #400- *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*

Hymn #712- *I Know Whom I have Believed*

Introduction

Coming to the end of the letter, Paul has pulled back the curtain, exposing the hearts of all false teachers, who contradict the teachings of Christ, given through His Apostles. And so, he has shown, that it is not only the case that these false teachers put forth manmade principles that are incapable of producing true godliness in any respect; and that these false teachers put forth manmade principles that, in fact, do the very opposite, defiling those who give heed to them, causing divisions in Christ's church, but furthermore, the very motives of these false teachers are impure. They are, in fact, harboring an inner pride and an inner desire to use godliness as a means of material gain. They are driven by a proud, covetous spirit, ultimately looking to line their own pockets with wealth as they seek to lay hold of the consciences of the people of God.

Having exposed this, Paul now moves on to expose the dangers of harboring a desire for wealth and material gain, knowing full well, that the tug of the world, is very powerful in this regard, so that the people of God might guard their own hearts and cling to the true, immaterial, and yet, eternal riches that are found in Jesus Christ alone, avoiding getting swept away by the natural desires of fallen man. And brethren, we would all do well to take heed to Paul's words of caution here, recognizing that this is perhaps the greatest challenge, presently facing the American church. We may not be, presently, facing much persecution from the anti-Christ, and in our Reformed setting, the false prophet may not have much power over us, but the great allurements of the whore of Babylon, are no doubt, constantly tugging at our souls, if we are honest.

I. The Riches of Contentment

Speaking then of the false teachers, Paul concludes verse 5 by stating that they, "suppose that godliness is a means of gain," and therefore, "From such withdraw yourself." And then, this

morning, moving into verse 6, we find Paul stating, "Now godliness *with contentment* is great gain." And what is Paul then doing by following up verse 5 with this statement? He is showing that true godliness, however, motivated and governed by the Word of God, and a true faith in, and union with, Christ, does provide great benefit and gain for the believer, when it is accompanied with contentment. That is to say, that, contrary to the false teachers, who would attempt to obtain godliness by their own fleshly means, being driven by covetousness and the desire to increase their material wealth, true godliness does have its great benefits and gains, when the desire to pursue that true godliness is accompanied by a heart that finds sufficiency and happiness in having one's basic needs met. In other words, strike the covetousness and the desire for material wealth from the equation and the pursuit of true godliness will bring much gain.

Now, what does Paul mean by this, and how can he be so certain of this? In what way does godliness with contentment bring about gain for the Christian? Verse seven will lead us to answer these questions. "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." And so, here we find, both, a direct and an implied answer to our questions.

1) In the direct sense, Paul exposes the utter foolishness and vanity of coveting and pursuing material wealth. How does he do this? By stating the obvious, which is, "Look, this life is temporary. We are not going to live here, forever. We are going to die. And when that time comes (which is really not that far ahead, for any of us), we will not be able to take anything material in this world with us! And so, the logic goes like this, "Why invest your soul in a pursuit of material wealth, when none of that material wealth can benefit you beyond the grave, which quickly approaches? Why covet things made of dirt and earthly soil, when all of these things which rot and decay, cannot pass through the great filter of death and the grave? You came into this world with nothing (naked), and you will most certainly leave this world in the same way.

2) And then, by way of implication, Paul is saying, "Would it not then be worth infinitely more, to invest your life in a pursuit of those immaterial things that carry over beyond the grave?" You see, learning to be content is a significant virtue, because it drives you to use what you need to survive in this world, while laying aside the distraction of coveting material things, so that you can focus on those things, which benefit the immaterial and everlasting soul. In other

words, working in our sanctification; working out our salvation, and striving, with the essential aid of the Holy Spirit, unto Christ-likeness, while difficult and painful, is a work that bears eternal fruits which pass beyond the grave and into eternity. And that is why godliness with contentment is great gain. It has lasting...indeed, everlasting benefits! To borrow the famous statement of the late Jim Elliot, "Why not give up what you cannot keep, to gain what you cannot lose." [We will continue with this theme, next time, Lord willing, when Paul charges Timothy to pursue godly virtues instead--vs. 11ff]

Notice, Paul adds in verse 7, "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." Again, Paul emphasizes here the importance of being content and happy with the basic necessities of food and clothing, while not getting strung up in the desire to be wealthy.

Finally, in verses 9&10, Paul moves on to expose the very real and profound danger of fostering a desire to be rich. And sadly, many fall by this way, again, especially in a context such as ours, where everything loudly appeals to such desires.

"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition" (vs. 9). Upon hearing this, perhaps we cannot help but recall the words of James, when he speaks of the mechanics of temptation in James 1:12-16: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren."

Here, James tells us that temptation finds its ultimate power in our own desires. To be sure, temptation is always present in some form, but it only becomes effective and powerful, when sinful desires exist within us, and are not properly dealt with through the gospel of our blessed Savior. And so, as we harbor, entertain and fuel sinful desires, and as we are then met by any temptation which appeals to those desires, we will find ourselves swept away, ultimately falling headlong into sin. Our inordinate desires are outreached arms, which cause us to get

entangled in temptation and sin. [Ill. Velcro takes two sides. But if only one side exists, it cannot stick to the material that it seeks to attach itself to]

Well, in our text, Paul warns of even the simple *desire* to be wealthy. He warns of the covetous spirit that hungers and thirsts after material and financial wealth. And he, much in alignment with James, shows how the simple desire, in itself, must be dealt with (the arm of desire must be cut off at the heart), lest it lay hold of temptation, and thereby, pull us down and leave us in the trap; the snare of spiritual decay and destruction. You see, so much of what surrounds us in the battle for the Christian faith, strongly appeals to our natural bent toward covetousness. And if we are unprepared, at any given moment, we can easily be swept away.

Notice, Paul states that they fall into a snare (a trap), "and into many foolish and harmful lusts..." You see, the desire for wealth and material gain is not an "island unto itself" type of sin. It branches out in many directions, leading to many avenues of sin. It snowballs down into an avalanche, ultimately leaving you crushed at the bottom of the hill. It's addictive, in a certain sense. You start out by indulging a small cup of covetousness, but then it doesn't satisfy, and so you want more, and then that doesn't satisfy, and you want more and more and more, until you are utterly drowned by your idolatrous desires. That's why Paul adds that these many foolish and harmful lusts, "drown men in destruction and perdition." You see, these lusts are all idols, and they make all kinds of empty promises, which ultimately drive your soul away from Christ, and into a state of spiritual bankruptcy.

Perhaps, it all starts out with a good desire. You would like to do a little better to provide for your family, and so, you work additional hours at work. Things improve, but then you begin to see the light at the end of the tunnel, where you can bring things to the next level, bringing your family to enjoy some of the additional things that some of your neighbors have. It is no longer about food, clothing and shelter. Now, the extras begin to make their way in. And so, you decide to take on a second job or to take on a few college courses to improve your "sellability" and worth. But, in the process of doing this, you realize that you are going to have to sacrifice some time with the family, and you are going to have to work (or go to school) on Sundays, as well. However, you convince yourself that this is only temporary; for a semester or two, or for a few months. Anticipating your increased wealth, you begin to slide the credit cards more often,

living beyond your means, blinding yourself to the fact that you are setting yourself up for a significant spiritual lapse. Your devotional life suffers greatly. The devotional life of your family suffers greatly. Your service in the church diminishes greatly. Your attendance is down to the very basic, Sunday morning service (at best), and even that is very sporadic.

And as the months, and then years begin to pass by, you bring yourself to the point that there seems to be no way back. You have failed to realize that robbing God, in any sense, never leads to a better place. The debt is mounting, your spiritual life is anorexic, your children are lost in the world, and your marriage suffers dearly, because Christ is no longer the center of your home. Perhaps this leads to adultery, because a lack of mutual fulfillment in Christ has led to a lack of mutual fulfillment in each other. Perhaps, opportunities for short cuts, lead you to steal from others or to work in unethical ways, so as to meet the demand of your material lusts. Perhaps, you harm others verbally or physically, who get in the way of your idolatrous pursuits. Needless to say, all manner of sins spring out of this type of context. And all in all, the walls eventually cave in, and you drown in the consequences of that which started out as a good desire, but has morphed into a sea of covetousness and idolatry.

Now, there are many scenarios that can play out of the general principle that Paul gives here. But the main point is this: A lack of contentment with the basic needs of life (food, clothing, shelter...etc) and a hunger for material and financial wealth, is a certain pathway to all kinds of evil, ultimately leading to destruction and perdition. [Ill. Note the parables of the soils...the one, which was sown among thorns and was ultimately choked out by the cares of this world...Professing, baptized, church members have gone this route many times!]

Finally, Paul elaborates further on what he has just said in verse 9, with the sobering "For" statement that he makes in verse 10. "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation (they fall right into it, headlong) and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*"

And here, we find the deceptive nature of wealth. It seems that by its great increase, one would be led to more and more satisfaction and joy. It seems so much better to have more, than

to be content, with the basic needs of life being met. But, ultimately, a pursuit of wealth, the love of money (note: not money, in and of itself, but the *love* of money) is a root that branches out into all kinds of evil (lying, stealing, hatred, murder, idolatry, slander, blasphemy, adultery, fornication...etc). And some have walked away from the Lord, having gone this route; having delved into the path of greed. And rather than leading to some place of increased joy and fulfillment, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. They have injured themselves deeply, and brought deep sorrow and destruction into the context of their lives. The promises were lies. The wealth could not provide what it promised. Indeed, it led to the very opposite....sorrow and misery!

And why is this the case? How can we be certain that what Paul boldly states here, is universally applicable to all people, everywhere? Because joy and fulfillment for the creature can never come, by abandoning the Creator, in a pursuit of created things. To pursue anything fervently, but Christ, is to turn away from Christ. And to turn away from Christ, is to turn away from life itself. True fulfillment; true life, can only, ever, be found in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus Christ alone!

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) I have titled this sermon, "The Riches of Contentment," brethren, in light of the paradox that Paul presents to us in this text. You see, in a nutshell, Paul wants to remind us that true riches are not (and cannot be) found in material things, because true riches are found in Jesus Christ alone. And brethren, if you have Christ, you could never be truly richer than you are already. Have you considered this? Perhaps, some of you might have forgotten?

In other words, brethren, what we have, and who we are, in Christ, is everything that we could ever have and need. We are children of the living God! And conformity to Christ, and every spiritual blessing that we have in Christ, are worth more than all of the material things in this world combined. But sadly, we forget this, don't we? The world still tugs at our hearts. And the need to maintain fellowship with Christ and His people; and the need to invest our lives in the pursuit of godly virtues, is always being attacked by the alluring temptations of visible and tangible things. And especially during times of trial, where we are most critically called to walk

by faith and not sight; where we are challenged to remain faithful and to stay the course and to persevere and endure, while wrestling against the world, the flesh and the devil; while contending with contrary feelings and emotions, it is not easy to stay on track, and it is so easy to forget.

And so, our God calls us to think "big picture" and long term. He compels us to be a people, who are constantly driven by the farmer's analogy of, "Whatever you sow, you will reap," so that, we will remember that only those who stay the course will obtain the reward. And those who cave into the pressures to compromise with the world, may for a time, store up riches in this life...but it will all be taken away in the end...and there will be eternal regret. You can't hold onto any of this, Brethren! Only, what is wrought in Christ will last forever! And so, Brethren, let me ask you, "Are you content with the basic needs of your life being met? Or are you storing up the goods of this world? Are you holding onto things that will ultimately rot and deteriorate, and which cannot pass beyond the great filter of the grave? Or are you securing further riches in Christ?" Let us prayerfully strive for true godliness in Christ, accompanied by the precious gem of contentment.

2) And if you are unsaved this morning; if you are not a true Christian, consider the treasures of this world that you are clinging to, and stop, and ask yourself, "Is all of this worth it?" Our Lord asks you the same question, this morning, which He asked His disciples back in the first century, "What will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world, and yet loses his own soul? And what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" You can't keep any of this!

But, there is something of eternal value that is within your reach, in the present, and which is far more valuable (infinitely more valuable) than anything else...and that is Christ, the Son of God, Himself! [III. The parable of the merchant seeking fine pearls]

Amen!!!

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21