

## ***SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST***

***1 Timothy 6:6-19; Psalm 91; Luke 16:16-31***

“Happiness is not having what you want, but wanting what you have.” At first glance, this would appear to be an ancient Chinese proverb. It sounds wise and deep. Guess what? It can be traced back to a late twentieth century Jewish Rabbi - Rabbi Satchel! Most people would think that it was from Confucius or someone like that, but I guess it makes sense that it would be a modern American who would be able to put into words the true relationship between happiness and our possessions.

People, especially those of us in industrialized nations, have never in history, had more things. We also have the spare time to ponder and pursue happiness. Yet, so many get the relationship all wrong. They still think that happiness, or fulfilment, can come from the accumulation of things.

So Paul the apostle, almost 2,000 years ago, warns the young pastor Timothy, about this spiritual pitfall. And he also outlines the proper relationship between fulfilment and possessions.

Basically he says that it is the love of things that leads to trouble. So instead of seeking riches, they, and we, should seek things like righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.

Notice that he doesn't say that money is evil. He says the love of money leads to evil. St Paul also advises those who are rich, should not to trust in their riches, but rather put their trust in God, who richly provides.

In the musical play, “Fiddler on the Roof”, the main character,

Tevye, is a poor man. But he prays that God would make him rich. His friend warns him “Money is the world’s curse”, to which Tevye replies, “May the Lord smite me with it. And may I never recover.” I think we have all felt that same way. But let’s look at what the Bible says about it.

The first point St. Paul makes is that “we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it”. Most, if not all of us here, have all heard that we can’t take it with us. There is a good reason for that, but most people don’t see the reason.

The story goes that there was a rich man who was faithful. He didn’t really understand why he couldn’t take it with him, so he prayed, “Lord, you have blessed me with so much, why can’t I take just some of it to heaven with, me since it was a gift from you.” God replied, “Just to teach you a lesson I will let you take one suitcase of your earthly possessions to heaven.” The man thought, and then he packed one suitcase, and left it in a special place so that he could grab it after he died, and take it to heaven.

He got to heaven with his suitcase and St. Peter looked in the book and said, “Here’s your name, you can go in, but you can’t take that with you, haven’t you ever heard you can’t take it with you?” So the man explained and St. Peter nodded and said, “OK. But can I ask a favor? Can I just see what you brought.”

The man opened the suitcase, and it was full of solid gold bricks. St. Peter laughed and said, “So why did you bring pavement?” In case you don’t get it, the Book of Revelation tells us the streets of heaven are paved with gold.

God gave us the priceless gift of life when we came into this world. God also gave us Eternal life to take out of this world.

What more could we want? And what value would any of the things in this world, beyond our relationships, have in eternity?

So true contentment is found in realizing that God has already given us all we need. But St. Paul goes on to warn that the love of earthly wealth leads to trouble. It is not wealth itself that is evil, it is the love of it that leads to evil. Out of love for wealth, people do things that lead to evil.

You see, most people have it all backward. They love things and use people. The things on this earth were put here by God for us to use, not to love. And the people were put here for us to love, not to use. So we should love people and use things.

To use people and love things, is a corruption of God's plan. It puts things backwards. We were not made for that. We were made to love God and our neighbour. To do any thing else leads to injury and pain.

So what should our goal be in our life? St. Paul tells us to seek after the virtues which go along with serving God. We should strive for "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness." We should value faith, and take hold of eternal life. In the end that is what endures.

We can't take money and electronics to heaven. But at the same time, it is not those things that bring meaning to this life.

Knowing who we are and finding peace, those kinds of things bring contentment. Loving our neighbour and serving God bring us joy, whether we have money in the bank, or not. Developing deep relationships with our family and friends brings satisfaction, no matter how much our income is.

So, follow the example of Jesus. He gave up the glories of heaven. He was rich beyond earthly standards. He was there when all the gold and jewels in existence were created. But He found completion and fulfilment in following His Heavenly Father's will by giving His life to save us.

It all comes down to one question: What are we living for? Why

do we get up in the morning? Why do we go to work, or school, or wherever it is that we go? Do we go to school so that we can make more money when we get out? Do we work each day so that we can make more money? Or do we get out of bed, and do those other things, so that we can love God and our neighbour.

Do we go about our daily activities with the idea that we are seeking to live righteously. Do we value the people we meet and not the things we acquire.

Paul said, "There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment." We may not get rich serving the Lord, then again, we might! In the end, it doesn't really matter. But through a godliness of life that is content with what God has provided, there is great gain. Through faith we can know the gift, not only of life after death, but of peace and joy in this world.

**AMEN.**