

Money Is the Root of All Evil
I Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19
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During our fall sermon series, we're looking at some things Christians say that sound like they should be in the Bible but aren't, things like "Everything happens for a reason" and "God doesn't give you more than you can handle." Usually at this time of year, we take a break from our sermon series so that I can preach to kick off our stewardship campaign. But this year, there's no need to pause because there are plenty of sayings about money that we can talk about.

For example, how about "give until it hurts." The idea behind that is that you should not give just a little, but enough to make you feel the pain of sacrificing for someone else. Great saying, but not in the Bible. You know what is in the Bible? "God loves a cheerful giver."

Or how about "money doesn't grow on trees." I used to hear this one all the time. I would respond with, "Well, technically, money is made of paper and paper comes from trees, so money does grow on trees." For some reason, that did not make my parents want to give me more money. It's also not in the Bible.

The statement we're exploring today is "Money is the root of all evil." That definitely sounds like it's in the Bible, doesn't it? It talks about money being bad and it uses the word "evil," good signs that it made the Good Book. But if you were listening carefully to the scripture I just read, you know that this saying is not in the Bible. The actually saying is similar in wording but much different in meaning.

The letter of 1 Timothy was written by the apostle Paul to his student Timothy, whom Paul left in charge of the church at Ephesus while Paul visited some other churches in the region. When Paul realized he wasn't going to be returning as quickly as he expected, he wrote Timothy two letters to instruct him on how to lead the church in Paul's absence. It's an interesting insight into the thinking of Paul when it comes to the practicalities of leading a church. This section could have been called, "How to Deal with Rich People."

That should be a seminary course, because rich people can be some of the biggest challenges in the church. In a church I served in seminary, there was a small group of wealthy people who were one economic rung below a community leader who was also a member of the church. The group wore their jealousy on their sleeves and tried to manipulate the senior pastor by strong-arming committees and withholding their giving when they didn't like a sermon. At another church, one of our biggest givers made sure to show me her pledge card every single year, as if to say, "Don't forget what I give to this church." Then, when she wanted certain things done at board meetings, she would like at me like, "Did you forget who I am? Did you forget how much I give?" Yes, rich people can be some of the biggest challenges.

Well, if that's true, this church is full of challenges, because in the grand scheme of things, we're all rich. I'm not going to bog you down with statistics because I think we all realize just how blessed we are financially. There's a little statement we rich people say to put our lives in perspective say when we're complaining about something. We say, "First-world problems." "I had to wait in line at Starbucks for 15 minutes before I got my pumpkin spiced latte!" First world problem. "My sweatpants keep falling down because my wallet is so heavy." First world

problem. “I’ve looked at everything on the internet today and there’s still three hours of work left.” First world problem. Actually, if you say that, your problems may run a little deeper.

We’re rich. If you drove to church this morning, or at least could have if you didn’t live so close, you’re rich. If you know where your food is coming from today, you’re rich. If you don’t have to worry about having your electricity cut off or being evicted from your home this week, you’re rich. And a saying like “Money is the root of all evil” may make you feel guilty about that, as if having money and being evil go hand in hand.

But that’s not what the saying says. What Paul says to Timothy is, “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.” Just a few small words make a world of difference in this saying. It’s not money but the love of money that causes all the trouble. And it’s not the root of all evil but of all kinds of evil, recognizing that the connection between money and evil may not be as strong as the cliché makes it sound.

While Paul’s saying about money is a good caution, it should also let us rich people breathe a little easier. There are some sayings in the Bible that can make us feel bad about having money, like when Jesus says, “It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into Heaven.” But we need to realize that’s not because rich people are bad people, but because the power of money can make even the best person do evil things in pursuit of more money. That’s the kind of power money has over us.

That doesn’t mean you can’t be rich and be good. Our stewardship theme for this year is “Giving for Good,” and here at Crestwood we certainly live that out each and every day. For 2019, we are giving 17.5% of our operating budget to outreach. If your giving stays as good as it is right now, that means we will give around \$160,000 to outreach in 2019. And that doesn’t include special offerings like Week of Compassion and the Crop Walk, nor does it include the money we spend to keep our buildings open so non-profit groups can use them free of charge. That is the epitome of giving for good, and we want you to seriously and prayerfully consider how you can help us do even more in 2020.

The reality is you have to have money to give money, so being rich isn’t a bad thing. What is a bad thing is when being rich becomes the end and not the means. Paul says that people get into trouble when they get eager to be rich. I’ll admit to that sin. I love money. You can buy nice things with money. You can go nice places with money. They say, “Money can’t buy happiness,” but it can buy a whole lot of things that make me happy. So, is it wrong to want to have money?

I don’t believe so. Where I believe we can get into trouble is when our desire to have money, and then to have more money, keeps us from remembering our role in God’s kingdom. In the very beginning of the Bible, God creates Adam and gives him the authority of a steward over creation. A steward is not an owner. A steward is a caretaker. A steward on an airplane is responsible for your safety and comfort from the moment you enter the plane until the moment you exit it. A steward’s job is to look after someone else’s property in a responsible and respectful way.

So, what does it mean for us to be stewards? It means God has entrusted us with all kinds of gifts – our own talents, the creation on which we live, and the money and possessions we own – and asked us to look after them in a responsible and respectful way. And I have to say, if I were

God, I'd fire us, because overall we've done a pretty poor job as a species. But that doesn't mean that each of us can't still do our part to be good stewards of God's gifts to us.

For me, what that means is making sure I have enough but that others do, as well. I love what Paul says about rich people in the second half of our reading: "They are to do good, to be rich in works, generous, and ready to share." Nothing there about selling all we have and giving the money to the poor or taking a vow of poverty. It's a call to responsible stewardship, to give for the good of God's kingdom.

If we are being good stewards, we are keeping money in its proper place in our lives, not as an idol to worship or a commodity to accumulate, but as a tool to use to ensure that we and those around us have enough. And that's where we can get into trouble. If we love money too much, we lose sight of the ways it can be used to help others and instead use it only for ourselves. This is not a new problem. Obviously, economic inequality has been around since the Roman Empire and is still a problem today. Why haven't we been able to solve this? Because we're human and we're vulnerable to things like worry and greed and power.

That's why we need Jesus, who reminds us that being rich and being faithful aren't mutually exclusive, but are hard to hold in harmony together. He says, "What good is it to gain the whole world if you forfeit your soul?" Jesus knows the power money can hold over us. That's why he's so critical of rich people like us. He wants us to be on our toes, ever vigilant to make sure we're rich in works and generous and ready to share. Because if we're not doing these things with our money, then we are inspiring evil in our world. And our world doesn't need any more evil in it.

There's a great scene in the show "Breaking Bad" when Walter White, the chemistry teacher turned drug kingpin, and his wife Skyler are standing in a storage unit with a covered pile in the middle. Skyler is trying to convince Walter that his love of money and power are ruining their family. Skyler pulls off the cover to reveal a huge stack of money. Walter asks, "How much is this?" Skyler answers, "I have no earthly idea. It's too much to count." Then she asks him, "How much is enough? How big does this pile have to be?"

How much is enough? How big do our piles of money have to be? I can't answer that for you; you know what you need to live on. But at what point does our pursuit of money become an end in itself? After all, we live in a society that determines people's value by their worth – not in musical talent or philanthropic efforts, but in dollars. The love of money is dangerous, so we have to be careful, and one of the ways we can do that is to be intentional about giving it away so that we feel the blessing of being a good steward.

God doesn't want us to be poor. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible talks about how God blesses us. What God wants from us is good stewardship, a sharing of resources, a mutual show of care and compassion by those who have enough for those who don't have enough. Paul says in v. 6, "There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment." That contentment comes both from having money and from giving away money. There's a balance to strike there.

As you consider what you'll pledge to Crestwood for 2020, I pray you consider what that balance is for you, and I pray you'll remember Paul's charge to do good, be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share. The love of money is indeed a root of all kinds of evil, but the proper stewardship of money can be an incredible gift to all of God's children. We are so blessed, aren't we? Let's be faithful stewards of our blessings by giving for good.

