

The Bible and Money

1 Timothy 6:6-10

Preface

Continuing with our sermon series “The Bible and Life,” today I would like to address the topic of “The Bible and Money.” Next week we will address “The Bible and Love.”

There is a popular song titled “But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.” The words go something like this, “I have climbed the highest mountains. I have run through the fields. I have crawled; I have scaled these city walls. But I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.”

These words describe well our culture today. Many people are searching, running, scaling, looking for something but not finding it. Unfortunately many people are looking in the wrong places. Most are looking for happiness in money and the accumulation of things.

Scripture

⁶ But godliness with contentment (self-sufficiency) is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Timothy 6:6-10 NIV

Introduction

Our text speaks of the importance of contentment (self-sufficiency through God). It also tells us the temptation of greed can bring great grief. We are not trained by our culture to be content? Everything around us teaches us to thirst after the accumulation of things.

In 1980 a typical grocery store in the United States stocked 15,000 items. Today the average grocery store stocks over 50,000 items.

This is a reflection of our obsessive compulsion to have more and more things, thinking they will bring satisfaction in our lives.

The Old Testament sums it up in the word “Covet;” “an unquenchable desire for more.” Galatians 5:20 calls it “*selfish ambition.*” The Greek word literally means “**to grasp for more and more.**”

When we get caught up in the trap of selfish ambition, great damage is done to our personal and spiritual life as well as to our society.

Don’t misunderstand me. The Bible clearly teaches the importance of hard work and the need to provide for our families.

Illus: Some states are passing laws that require welfare recipients to submit to a periodic drug test. Many people are all up in arms over this. Most employers today require drug screening. So if those who work for a living should submit to a drug test, why shouldn’t those who do not be required to do the same.

As Christians, we are called to help those in need. But we are also called to help ourselves by working hard and being fruitful.

I saw this week where one state is changing the name of unemployment compensation to reemployment compensation. As it should be for we all should work and carry our load.

⁴ Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. ⁵ He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.” Proverbs 10:4-5 NIV

The Bible is clear on the importance of planning and working hard.

But it is also clear on the pitfalls of becoming obsessed with the desire for material things. This is the topic of the message today.

What causes us to become obsessed with acquiring money and material things? One answer is advertising. Americans are constantly bombarded with advertising. You turn on the television and there are commercials every few minutes. You listen to the radio and you get the same. If you get on the internet, the pages are cluttered with ads. While driving down the road you see billboards.

And then there is electronic and printed junk mail. Who doesn't like to look at those sales catalogs that come each week? (Cabala's Catalog)

The average American is exposed to 3,000 advertisements a day each promising something that will bring happiness. If you just had that new exercise machine, you could be built like the guy in the commercial. If you just had those new golf clubs, you could hit a golf ball like the pros. If you just had that new hunting device you could surely get the big one. If you just had the right tan and the right makeup and the right clothes you would look so much better and feel better about yourself. We are hit with so many ads that we can't help believing the lure of what they offer.

Slowly but surely we become convinced that a person's worth is judged by what they own. Our level of contentment and self esteem becomes closely tied to the accumulation of things. But these things never bring permanent happiness so the pursuit continues.

Content

When we are overly concerned with the accumulation of things:

1. We develop poorly arranged priorities.

As Christians, if we read our Bible and listen to the teachings of God's word, we generally understand what our priorities should be. We understand that our first allegiance is to God and serving Him. This is followed by our commitment to our family and service to others.

When we become obsessed with the accumulation of things, our priorities change and become poorly arranged. Usually God is the first to go to the back of the line. The first area where priorities change with God is in the area of giving. We reason that we will stop giving for a while to afford the things we desire.

The Bible tells us to bring our first fruits to the Lord. Instead, we start giving God the leftovers if there are any. We go from tithers to

tippers. The Preacher doesn't know about it and your friends and family do not know but God knows.

At a time when we need God's help and blessings the most, we hinder ourselves by being unfaithful. As a result our relationship with God spirals downward and we begin to withdraw from church and worship in the interest of other priorities.

Eventually we look ourselves in the mirror and wonder how we got from where we were to where we are now.

Illus: Christians and even ministers are not immune to this temptation. I have known ministers who had wonderful ministries but because of wayward desires, their priorities changed and they lost their ministry and even their families.

Quote: *"Greed is the crack through which other sins gain access."*

2. We become burdened with debt.

Nothing takes the wind out of the sail of life like debt. Debt is the number one cause of depression and often leads to suicide. We buy things we cannot afford because we want them now.

When the new wears off and repaying the debt becomes a reality, we become burdened. People of all income brackets find themselves burden with debt.

When you combine the philosophy that things can bring happiness with our societies easy access to credit and a family can be devastated by the burden of debt.

Illus: In a recent survey, 93% of female teenagers said that shopping was their favorite pastime. One man joked, "If my wife doesn't show up at the mall for a week, they send her a get well card."

As the burden of debt bears down on us, it affects our physical and spiritual health. It becomes a matter of constant concern and thought. We worry about how we are going to pay our obligations.

As if that weren't enough, the world has learned how to make money from our debt burden. We are offered "get rich solutions" to solve our problem. Today, all but two states have some form of legalized gambling from lotteries to river boats and everything in between. In 2010 Americans lost 72.2 billion dollars in gambling.

Marty Seligman, a professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania conducted a study of depression. He found that there has been a sharp increase in depression since World War II. People born after 1945 are 10 times more likely to suffer depression than people born earlier. His explanation is that people today are so caught up in money and material things they become consumed with self-centeredness.

The more we have the more we want, and the more unhappy we become! Our text tells us the pursuit of things at all costs, causes much grief.

3. We unintentionally destroy relationships.

Studies show the number one cause of marital problems is financial stress. When we are stressed with financial obligations, we become preoccupied and difficult to live with. Eventually this damages our relationships.

James 4:1 says, *"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Do they not come from your own desires that battle within you? You want something, but don't get it, so you kill and you covet. You can't have what you want so you quarrel and fight."*

What happens when you borrow money from family members and you are unable to pay them back? It damages the relationship. What happens when you promise to provide something for your spouse or children but you are unable to do so because of debt? It damages the relationship.

Illus: I can't tell you how many times I have been involved in conducting a funeral only to find myself in the middle of a squabble

between family members over money and / or land. Everyone wants their share and then some.

1 Kings 21 tells of King Ahab who wanted his neighbor's small parcel of land. He had a huge palace and plenty of land but he wanted Naboth's little parcel for a vegetable garden. When Naboth refused to sell it to him, the Bible says the king became angry and sulked. To relieve his depression, his wife Jezebel arranged to have Naboth killed so Ahab could have his piece of land. Do you think that brought Ahab happiness? No but it did bring down the anger of God. (1 Kings 21)

As Christians we must recognize the real cause of our burdens and not allow selfish ambition to destroy our relationships.

Solutions

So how do Christians control our thirst for material things?

4. We must recognize things do not bring real happiness.

We must recognize that stuff will never fulfill us. Many of us have acknowledged this in our minds but our lifestyles have not accepted it. We have been unsuccessful at making the necessary changes.

Illus: The most toured home in America is the white house. The second most toured home is the home of Elvis Presley. Graceland is toured by hundreds of people every day. It is a combination of the home, an amusement park and an historic site. By the world's standards, Elvis had everything. But you can walk 50 yards from the back door of his home and find his tombstone where he was buried at the age of 43. With depression and loneliness, he died from an overdose of pills.

Material things did not bring lasting happiness to Elvis Presley and they will not for you or me.

Mark 8:36 says *"What good is it, to gain the whole world, and forfeit your soul and what can a man give in exchange for his soul."*

We need to understand that only Christ can bring lasting happiness and contentment.

Illus: Consider the golden arches of McDonald's for a moment. They sell something most kids demand. It is a combination of food and a toy. The toy isn't much. It is usually a cheap little plastic thing. What do they call this combination of food and toy? A "Happy Meal" of course. You aren't just buying pressboard chicken nuggets or a hamburger and fries, you are buying happiness. How long does that happiness last? Oh, about 5 minutes if you are lucky.

As adults, we are just as gullible. We often think the things we long for will bring us happiness when we the Bible tells us they will not. And they will especially not bring happiness if we can't really afford the purchase to start with.

The world around us keeps telling us we are just one happy meal away from true happiness. Our happy meals just keep getting more expensive.

Things do not bring lasting happiness, Christ does.

5. We must give what we have to God.

God's word tells us the things we have are a blessing from God. They really are not ours as we are simply entrusted with them. Everything we have should be given back to God for his glory and his kingdom.

The best way to wean ourselves from the desire for stuff is to let go of what we do have and let it be God's. When we do, he uses it for his glory and desires to trust us with more.

Amazing unexplainable Christian growth comes when we learn to give generously of our material goods. Paul spoke of this when he wrote Timothy.

"Command those who are rich to be generous and willing to share their money. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a

firm foundation and they may take hold of the life that is truly life." (1 Tim. 6:17).

Contentment and happiness come when you are willing to give according to God's guidance. You don't have a material shaped hole on the inside; you have a God shaped hole that only he can fill.

Conclusion

The Apostle Paul tells us the secret to true contentment in Philippians 4:11. He writes, *"I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength."*

The Bible says the secret to contentment is to focus on Christ and to seek first the Kingdom of God, and everything else will take care of itself.

But you must know this doesn't just happen. It requires a decision. If you just drift along, there is enough pressure and influence from advertising and inner greed, that things will soon occupy your focus.

You must make a decision that you're not buying into it anymore. You must say, "I don't need those things to make me happy, because they aren't going to anyway. I certainly don't need anything I cannot afford. I will not serve things, I will serve the Lord. I will focus on that which is most important. I will rearrange my activities to match God's priorities for my life."

Luke 12:15 says, *"A man's life does not consist of the abundance of things he has."*

Everyone eventually learns the truth of that verse. Will you learn it today?