

How Can We Get Rich, Quick?

1 Timothy 6:1-19

September 30, 2007

Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be blasphemed. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful to them on the ground that they are members of the church; rather they must serve them all the more, since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these duties.

Whoever teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that is in accordance with godliness, is conceited, understanding nothing, and has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words. From these come envy, dissension, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among those who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 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.

But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Two years ago I showed a video as my sermon. It was the Sunday after our kick-off celebration that we had at Seneca Valley High School. It was the Sunday we received pledges for the capital campaign. The video I showed was titled, "Celebrate What's Right in the World," by a man named DeWitt Jones. Jones is a photographer for National Geographic magazine, and he has traveled all over the world photographing pictures that have stirred our souls.

In the video, Jones talks about how we need to look at life in a new way. Using his photographs, he shows how easy it is to look at a scene and see nothing of value, but if we are

willing to look harder, we can find beauty in even the most austere and mundane places. All it requires is looking for what is good rather than for what is bad.

One of the people Jones spoke about was a woman who lived in the Hebrides Islands off the west coast of Scotland. She was revered throughout Britain as its best weaver. In fact, she had been given a medal by the Queen of England for her work. Jones traveled to the Hebrides to take her picture as part of an article. He knocked on her door, and she answered. He told her who he was and why he was there, and she replied by saying, “Wait, my brother is upstairs and he may be dying. Can you come back in an hour?” Jones felt foolish, but agreed. When he came back, he heard her on the loom, passing the shuttle back and forth. She then took him into her house and served him tea and biscuits, refusing to eat until he had eaten first. And they talked.

Jones took a few pictures, but felt uncomfortable, as though he was being an inconvenience to her. But she insisted that he stay. They spoke for a while longer, and increasingly he felt as though he was in the midst of a great sage. Not knowing what else to say, but wanting her to teach him some sort of wisdom, he asked, “What do you think about when you weave?” He expected some sort of profound answer, but what he received didn’t seem all that wise at first. She replied, “I wonder if I’ll run out of thread.” Then she noticed that Jones seemed perplexed by her answer, and that he had expected something wiser.

She paused, smiled, and said, “When I weave, I weave.” That got him thinking, “When I weave, I weave. When I photograph, I photograph. When I serve, I serve. When I celebrate, I celebrate. There’s no use walking anywhere to preach, unless your walking as your preaching. And that evening, through her actions and her words, Marion Campbell showed me what it might be like to soar. She was who she was. With discipline, with grace, and total lack of ego. She was a thermal rider. Not just the best in the world, but the best in the world.” She was a sage.

Looking at her picture, you wouldn’t immediately think much of her. Her face was deeply lined by the elements and age. She lived in an old house that had cracks in the plaster, in the midst of a stark and barren land. Her furniture was worn and covered with needlepoint cloths to cover rips and scratches. Her clothes were old and frumpy. You couldn’t tell by looking at her clothes, her hair, her skin, her house, or any of the outward stuff that we usually use to tell these things, but she was sitting on an incredible treasure. She was rich in things that matter: humility, spirit, grace, creativity, love, and so much more.

We Americans can be so shallow in what we think makes a person wealthy, and we get it so wrong so much of the time. I’m not trying to say that having material wealth is awful and terrible. It isn’t. But an overwhelming focus on wealth can slowly destroy our lives. When we have wealth, thinking that it makes us something, we’ve become poor without even knowing it.

Our passage speaks to this, although many people misunderstand or misinterpret it. I’ve heard people misquote it in the past, saying that it says “money is the root of all evil.” That’s not what our passage says. It doesn’t say that money is the root of all evil, but that *love* of money is the root of all evil. And we live in a culture that often is in love with money.

We live in a culture that is confused in its worship. Our heroes tend to be those who are wealthy. Think of the people who are revered in our culture. Athletes, celebrities, Bill Gates, Donald Trump—people like that. They are the superrich, and many of us wish we could find a way to join them. But do we really want to join them? So many of them are rich in wealth, but poor in spirit. For example, I look at several celebrities out there who are very wealthy, yet their lives are a mess. In our house, we have a basic rule. Our girls can grow up to become whatever they want to be, but they are not allowed to become like Lindsey Lohan, Britney Spears, or Paris Hilton. We've talked to them about how these three are living messed up lives, but their super wealth keeps them from growing up. Yet these are people revered by so many—at least they have been in the past. They are rich in wealth, but destitute in spirit.

Why do we have such a hard time looking up to those wealthy in immeasurable wealth like Marion Campbell? Marion Campbell was superrich in things that matter. She lived our passage for this morning. Our passage is about what brings true wealth. Listen again to what it says:

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Did you hear the phrases that matter? “do good,” “rich in good works,” “generous,” “ready to share.” These are the things that matter.

Let me close with a story that I think captures this whole idea. There was a poor man who lived near the river. Each day he went down to the river to gather water. He filled his two water pots, slung them on a rod across his shoulders so they hung on either side of him, and walked back up the hill to his hut.

One pot was perfect, but the other had cracks in it. As he walked home with his water he lost about half the water from the cracked pot. Over the years this became an increasing embarrassment to the pot with the cracks. It wanted so much to serve its master to perfection, but its flaws made it impossible. Eventually, the pot spoke to its master: “O master, I am so embarrassed. I want so much to be perfect for you and carry your water, but my cracks and flaws make it impossible. How can you stand to use me when I am so flawed?”

The master looked at the pot and said, “You don't realize what a gift you are to me. As I walk home with you, I want you to look at the path.” When they reached home, the man asked the pot, “What did you see on the path?” The pot, still embarrassed, said, “All I could see was the water spilling out of me.” “Didn't you see the beautiful flowers on the side of the path?” The pot said, “Yes, sir. But what does that have to do with me?”

The man said, “All you can see are your flaws, but because of your flaws I have beauty in my life everyday. As we walk from the river, your water spills on the side of the path and waters those flowers. I pick those flowers everyday to put on my table and to give to others as gifts.

Because of your flaws, I have beauty to admire and share with others. Your flaws bring beauty into life.”

It is this kind of attitude in life that brings riches. Our flaws don't matter. Only love matters. In the end, what matters is the extent to which, despite our flaws, our lack, our uncertainties, and our struggles, the extent to which we are able to love, to give, and to share and give life to others.

Amen.