

SERMON A Chasm
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SCRIPTURE

1 Timothy 6: 6-19

⁶Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; ⁸but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹But 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. ¹⁰For 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. ¹¹But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹²Fight 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.

¹³In 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 ¹⁴to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. ¹⁶It 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. ¹⁷As 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. ¹⁸They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, ¹⁹thus 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.

LUKE 16: 19-31

¹⁹“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²²The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. ²⁴He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that

during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. ²⁶Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' ²⁷He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house— ²⁸for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' ²⁹Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' ³⁰He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' ³¹He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

SERMON A Chasm

Money. Let's be honest. It's an important part of our lives. We use money to meet our basic needs – food, housing, clothing, our health. And there are niceties we buy for ourselves and those we love. And there are causes that we support- our church, organizations that assist those who lack money or food or clothing or health care, or organizations that care for the planet or pets or research into diseases. There is much we can do with money, if we have it. We could say there is a chasm between those who have lots of money and those who have little or no money.

And there is much said about money.

Jesus had a lot to say about money throughout his life. Today we hear one such story, the parable about The Rich Man and Lazarus.

Paul has a few things to say about money, specifically about the temptations of money, love of money, and faith. Paul gives us instructions on how we are supposed to live in relationship to people and money.

And in our time, singers even sing about money. The first song about money that came to my mind was one from the 70's, "Money," by Pink Floyd. It happens to be number one as I looked at the top 100 songs about money. I imagine some you might have heard it as a teen or young adult or as a parent if you have an adult child who was a teen in the 70's. You might have heard it as your youngster listened to it.

The song starts with instrumental and the sound of coins clinking in an old fashioned cash register. The lyrics start with David Gilmour singing "Money, get away. Get a good job with more pay and you're ok." The lyrics continue - money is a gas, you should grab the cash and other things to grab are caviar and new cars. David Gilmour, continues singing that he thinks he will buy football team. He adds "Money, it's a hit. Don't give me that do goody - good bulls..." He sings that he belongs to the first class traveling set and even needs a leer jet.

Now if you are watching the music video for this song on YouTube, the opening images include lots of coins, a extravagant swimming pool, fancy cars, expensive boats and jets, models on the runway, casinos, gold bullion, and crowds in suits walking together down a crowded city street. These colorful images are contrasted with black and white images of a man sleeping on a park bench, a worn-looking elderly woman with a babushka, a young mother with a child, and coal miners in hard hats walking together on their way out of work. These images of impoverished individuals appear sparsely in the beginning of the song but more frequently in the instrumental segment before this last verse.

The words of that last verse are “Money, it’s a crime. Share it fairly, but don’t take a slice of my pie. Money, so they say, is the root of all evil today. But if you ask for a rise, it’s no surprise that they’re giving none away.” And the word “away” echoes as the song ends.

The lyrics to this song and the images of the music video, contemporary images, depict a chasm that exists between the rich and the poor today. The chasm also exists in Jesus’ parable – both while the rich man and Lazarus were alive and after they have died.

The rich man is eating sumptuously at his table. It’s an everyday meal but it is sumptuous and the man is dressed in finery. Purple was the most expensive of cloth. The linen would have been fit for the cloths of the temple. Judging by Jesus’ description, the crowd listening to Jesus would have considered this man not just wealthy but obscenely wealthy.

Now, just outside the rich man’s gate was Lazarus. We know that he is poor and hungry; that he longs for scraps from the rich man’s table. He is so poor that his skin is broken down and he has sores. Yet the rich man does not offer him anything. It’s not that the rich man cannot see him. He’s right there. Lazarus is at the rich man’s gate; where he enters and leaves each day. Yet the rich man does nothing to help Lazarus. The dogs do more to tend to Lazarus by licking his wounds.

As you know, both men die in this story. Lazarus is resting peacefully and comfortably in the bosom of Abraham. The rich man ends up in Hades, suffering in eternal fire, longing for a sip of water.

Now the rich man, calls to Father Abraham, asking that Lazarus come to him with a drop of water and later that Lazarus go to his brothers and warn them of what is in store for them. Even in Hades, the rich man does not afford Lazarus any dignity. He sees Lazarus as nothing more than a servant – one to bring him water or to speak to his brothers.

We did not hear that the rich man murdered or stole or committed what we think of as a grievous crime. The sin of the rich man was one of omission. He failed to show compassion or caring, to respect or offer dignity, to love his neighbor – the poor and suffering person at his gate. He failed to share his wealth.

And we did not hear that Lazarus had lived an exemplary life. No, we only know that he was poor – he was hurting, struggling, and suffering. And Jesus, in what we know as the Sermon on

the Plain, had told the crowd 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 'Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.'" (Luke 6: 20-21) Well we know that Lazarus was poor and hungry while he was alive, but that when he died, he was comfortable with Abraham.

In this parable, Abraham told the rich man that he had received good in his life and Lazarus had received "evil things." Evil things – poverty, hunger, wounds. Jesus considers poverty, hunger and pain or inadequate health care evil.

The rich man had received good things. They were money and the things that money can buy. In the song, Money, the lyrics of the final verse say that money is the root of all evil. Well, the apostle Paul in his first letter to Timothy does not say that money is the root of all evil. He says that the "love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." Money by itself is not the problem. It is how one approaches and deals with money that is the problem – whether we worship it or make having it and things we can buy the priority in our lives.

Paul even gives us ways to approach money. He reminds us that we can be satisfied with simple things - "if we have food and clothing, we will be content." He warns those who want to be rich of the risk to falling into temptation and becoming "trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.." and that in one's "desire to be rich one may wander away from faith."

He encourages us, as people of God, rather than pursuing wealth, to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith;" Paul reminds us to not set our "hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment... that we are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous and ready to share ... storing up treasure of a good foundation so that we might take hold of the life that really is life."

If we follow these words, we can put money in its proper place. We can bridge that chasm separating those who are rich and those who are poor. After all, when we share, are generous, do good works, and live in ways that are righteous, godly, faithful and love – then we will actually take care of one another rather than inflict the evils of poverty, hunger or physical suffering on another. We will actually begin to live together as God wants us to live.

One of the last songs on that list of 100 songs about money is by Kenny Rogers. It is entitled, "Money Isn't What Really Matters." The song begins

"Money isn't really what matters.

Fat cats just getting fatter.

All the money in the world means nothing

Keep looking for one thing

When you find it your heart will tell you..."

And the song ends with

“Love

You know its love

For everyone this must be true...

It's love

You gotta have love.”

As we look to our faith and examine our relationship money, may that relationship be based on love, not love of money but love of God and neighbor. May we choose to generously use our money in ways that benefit others. May we seek to build bridges rather than chasms; to build God's kin-dom of love.