

The True Discipleship Broadcast-1983-14 True Discipleship

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of contentment and godliness, warning against the dangers of desiring riches and the consequences of trusting in them.

Duration: 23:18

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:20

Topics: "True Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the fleeting nature of worldly possessions and the dangers of pursuing wealth. He shares anecdotes and quotes from various sources to illustrate his point. The speaker highlights the story of a man who worked tirelessly to accumulate wealth, only to realize the emptiness of his pursuits when faced with his own mortality. Ultimately, the sermon encourages listeners to prioritize their relationship with Jesus over material possessions and to seek fulfillment in Him rather than in worldly gain.

Transcript

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

Or, as some versions say, with these let us be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

But you, O men of God, flee these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you are also called, and have confessed a good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God, who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus, who witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless, until our Lord Jesus Christ appearing, which he will manifest in his own time, he who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power.

Amen. Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

O Timothy, guard what was committed to your trust. Avoid the profane and vain babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith. Grace be with you.

Amen. In verse 5, at the latter part of the verse, it speaks about a class of men who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. Well, you only have to turn the TV on, or the radio today, and see religious charlatans begging for money, and actually raking it in by the bushels, unwilling to give any financial accountability to anybody else, and bringing reproach on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

No wonder the skeptic Voltaire said years ago, when it comes to money, all men are of the same religion. That was a low blow, but I can understand why he said it. It isn't true, of course, but as he observed religious people in the world, he realized that the dollar, that money at least, had a tremendous attraction for them.

When it comes to money, all men are of the same religion. And so here it speaks about men who think that godliness is a way to financial gain, a means to financial gain. God forbid that any one of us should ever use the work of the Lord as a means of enriching ourselves.

We've already seen in the teachings of the Lord Jesus in the gospel, that he sent his disciples out poor, without any thought that they'd ever become rich in that type of work. In contrast to that kind of gain, in verse 6, Paul tells Timothy that godliness with contentment is great gain. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

If you have a godly character, and you are content with the necessities of life, you have something that money can't buy. It's a wonderful thing, really, to see a godly Christian who's satisfied with Christ. It doesn't mean he's lazy.

It doesn't mean he just sits around sipping lemonade all day, but it means he's content to live a simple lifestyle. Paul says godliness with contentment is great gain. I think I told you, didn't I, of Paul Stoye's story of the farmer who had an obsession to multiply land.

He wanted to join farm to farm, and this was the goal of his life. He kept buying more and more land and expanding his operations. Then he heard that there was cheap land among the Bashkirs, so he sold all that he had, and he made the journey to the country of the Bashkirs and arranged a deal with them.

The deal was that for a thousand roubles, he could have as much land as he could encircle by foot in a day. He would begin at sunrise and finish at sunset, and he could have all that land. So, the next morning, he set out and walked far in one direction, and then turned to the left.

He'd see a plot of very fertile land that he wanted, so he would detour around that and go along the way in a circle, and then he'd see a grove of trees that he had to have, and he would go around them, and the day wore on. He made many detours to include extra areas of good soil. By the time he made his last turn, he realized he had gone too far, and so he ran and ran and ran as fast as possible to get back to the starting point before sunset.

Faster and faster he ran and finally staggered and fell across the starting point just as the sun set. He lay there dead, and they buried him in a small hole, all the land he needed. Paul says to Timothy, We came into the world empty-handed, and that's the way we leave.

You have the babies at home, some of you. You see the little clenched fist. Next day, you go to the funeral.

The man is there with his hand quite relaxed. In fact, Alexander the Great, when he died, before he died, he asked that in the casket his hands be shown outstretched, his palms outstretched, to indicate that the man who had conquered the world left it empty-handed. That's true.

It's an interesting thing to me that people who live for the dollar, they never want to have a dollar sign engraved on their tombstone, do they? They always want a cross or a Star of David to indicate how pious they were. But the thing they lived for was the dollar, and if they were really honest, they would have that dollar sign engraved. That was their God.

And then we come to one of the strongest statements, I think, in the epistles. It says, Having food and clothing with these, we should be content. Now, I'd just like to stop here and ask, how many Christians do you know who are content with food and clothing? First of all, I should explain something, that that word clothing is an interesting word.

Literally, it means covering. It's the Greek word skepasma, S-K-E-P-A-S-M-A, and it means covering, and it's not only the clothes that you wear, but it's the roof over your head as well. It's a multi-purpose word.

So, let's put that all together. Having food, clothing, and a roof over your head, which is a legitimate interpretation of the verse. Having food, clothing, and a roof over your head, let us be content.

We shall be content with those things. But, frankly, not very many people are content with it. Most people think that life means accumulating.

One of the great problems in modern society, in the United States, is having enough storage space, because people are naturally pack rats, and they want to store it away, and we need attics, and we need garages, and we need all kinds of areas to store away things. Somebody has said there are two ways to be rich. One is in the multitude of your possessions, and the other is in the fewness of your wants.

This verse says that Christians should be rich in the fewness of their wants, and, really, it is a wonderful thing. Hudson Taylor said that he enjoyed the luxury of having few things to care for. I like that.

He enjoyed the luxury of having few things to care for, and every year he took an inventory of all his possessions, and disposed of things that he felt were clogging his life. But it really takes resolute action on the part of a Christian, real determination to carry through with something like that. People going on a long journey should travel light, and Christians are going on a long journey.

They're not going to take any of it with them. They can use it for the Lord today. Of course, this raises the question, well, how do I know? What rule of thumb can I follow in reducing my inventory? And so, I would suggest to you again David Livingston's rule of thumb.

It's been one of the truths that I have tried to live by. He said, I will place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of Christ. If anything will advance the interest of that

kingdom, it shall be given away or kept only as by the giving or keeping of it I shall most promote the glory of him to whom I owe all my hopes in time and in eternity.

If it will advance the kingdom by my keeping it, I'll keep it. If it will advance the kingdom by my disposing of it, I'll dispose of it. May grace and strength sufficient to enable me to adhere faithfully to this resolution be imparted to me so that not in name only all my interests may be identified with his cause.

Well, that makes very good sense to me, a good rule to follow, and I'm indebted to David Livingston for leaving that behind. Some of you have read the writings of Malcolm Muggeridge. He was an interesting man.

He was an Englishman who searched for meaning in life. He became a communist. He went to Russia, found that that didn't satisfy, went through philosophy, the whole gamut, and finally he became a Christian.

But his writings are delightful, and he has a withering scorn for unreality in life. And he said this, As I look back, I realize that the only times I have been happy have been in simplicity and austerity. A little white room with a chair and a table, fruit and rice on a green leaf, a barrack hut or a tent.

Such circumstances bring their own ecstasy. And what it really says is the simple life is the happy life. This is true.

People in California spend hundreds of thousands of dollars building an elaborate home with all the finest gadgets and gimmicks and fixtures, and they move into the home with the finest furniture that they can buy, and then the first night they go out in the backyard and cook hamburgers over an open fire. They want to get back to the simple life, you know. Roger Kipling was speaking to the graduating class at McGill University one time, and he said, Young people, in going through life, don't think too much of money, fame, or power, because someday you'll meet a man who cares for none of these things, and then you'll realize how poor you are.

And I met that man. His name was Jesus. And when I met him, I realized how poor I was.

Watchman Nee said, I want nothing for myself. I want everything for Christ. And I've quoted Denny to you before.

The reason I keep quoting it is because it means so much to me. He said, And the one perfect life that has been lived in this world is the life of him who owns nothing, and who left nothing but the clothes that he wore. Isn't that an amazing thing that the Lord of life and glory, creator and sustainer of the universe, would come down to this world and own nothing, and leave nothing but the clothes that he wore? I'd like to be more like that man of Galilee.

Having food and clothing and covering, let us be there with content. Verse 9 says, Those who desire to be rich. Now, when we read that carelessly, we think he's going to talk about rich people, but he's not necessarily talking about rich people.

He's talking about those who desire to be rich. There's a difference, isn't there? I mean, you can have nothing and be covetous. You can be very poor in this world's goods, and yet desire to be rich.

And that's what he's speaking about here. There was a man who wanted to become rich in the stock market, and as the fable goes, he was told that he could have anyone wish that he wanted. And he said,

Great! I want to see the newspaper a year from today.

Of course, if he could see the newspaper a year from today, he would turn to the stock market page right away, and he could see what stocks would be selling for. Here's a stock selling for \$6 today, and a year from today, it would be selling for \$36. Well, he'd buy it at \$6, and a year from today, he'd sell it at \$36, and if he had enough money, he'd make a fortune.

So, when he got the paper, he gloated about how rich he would become. But then he looked at the death notices, and his name was there. He was going to die a year from today.

Cameron Thompson said that God pours out his choicest blessings on those who are anxious that nothing will stick to their hands. Individuals who value the rainy day above the present agony of the world will get no blessing from God. This is a tremendously powerful statement.

Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation. They become enslaved by greed, and they engage in fraud, and in perjury, and in robbery, and even in murders, in order to get what they want. There's an interesting book that recently came off the press.

It's called Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger by Ronald Sider. And he said, the rich fool is the epitome of the covetous person. That is, the rich fool in the gospel.

He has a greedy compulsion to acquire more and more possessions, even though he does not need them. And his phenomenal success at piling up more and more property leads to the blasphemous conclusion that material possessions can satisfy all his needs. From the divine perspective, however, this attitude is sheer madness.

He's a raving fool. That's what Ronald Sider says. He doesn't have a good word to say for the rich fool.

Fall into temptation and a trap into many foolish and harmful desires. Quoting Ronald Sider again, he says, a desire for riches prompts people to do anything for the sake of economic success. The result, Scripture warns, is anguish now and damnation later.

What this is saying is that money is like seawater. The more you drink of it, the more you want it. A man had \$500,000 and complained to a friend that he wasn't happy.

He said, when I had \$50,000, I was happy. Now I have \$500,000 and I'm not happy. The friend said, that's easy.

Give \$450,000 away. He said, I can't. It's like holding on to an electric wire, isn't it? You can't let go.

Let plunge men into ruin and destruction. And incidentally, these are very strong words. Ruin and destruction really here mean eternal damnation.

They really do. This is the story of mankind. Riches are dangerous, Ronald Sider said, because their seductive power very frequently persuades us to reject Jesus.

And his kingdom. You know, that's true. It's very hard to lead rich people to Jesus.

You ever think of that? If you wanted to have fruit in the gospel, go to the poor. You say, God loves everybody. I know God loves everyone.

But, it says the poor have the gospel preached unto them. It says the common people heard him gladly. It says, don't you know that God has chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to them that love him.

So, I say, if you want to have a good work for God, go to the poor people. They'll listen. Somebody has said that money is the universal passport for everywhere except heaven, and the universal provider for everything but happiness.

That is true. Sidlow Baxter tells a most poignant story to me. I'll never forget when I first read it.

It stabbed my heart. It was about a young man in England who used to be anxious about salvation. He'd go to the local church and hear the gospel preached, and he was anxious.

And he determined, however, that when he grew up, he'd somehow become owner of a cotton mill, and not even salvation must interfere with that. And for years he worked inordinately until in his forties he owned a big mill and had a lot of money. Then he became ill and lay dying.

And when he was on his bed dying, they heard him frantically muttering, over there, Jesus saying something, but I can't hear him for the sound of the mill. That's what Welch does, crowds out the voice of Christ. You probably read this, but in 1923 there was a very important meeting held at the Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago.

Some of the richest men in the world gathered at this meeting. Nine of the world's most successful financiers. For instance, there was the president of the largest independent steel company, the president of the largest gas company, the president of the largest utility company, a great wheat speculator, the president of the New York Stock Exchange, a member of the president's cabinet, the greatest bear in Wall Street.

Bear in Wall Street. The bear market is the down market. This man would play the down market in Wall Street.

Bull market is when the market's moving up. Head of the world's greatest monopoly and the president of the Bank of International Settlements. These men had found the secret of making money.

Twenty-five years later, their situations had changed. Charles Schwab lived on borrowed money and died of bankruptcy. Samuel Insull died a fugitive from justice and penniless.

Howard Hopson was found insane. Arthur Cutton died abroad, insolvent. Richard Whitney was released from prison, and Albert Hall was pardoned from prison so he could die at home.

Jesse Livermore died a suicide. Ivar Kruger died a suicide. Leon Fraser died a suicide.

Those were the nine men who had gathered at the Edgewater Beach Hotel. Success in the financial world. They had learned the art of making money, but they didn't learn the art of making a life.

Psalms 52-7 says, Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. What a verse. It really packs a punch, doesn't it? Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.

The trouble with riches is you can't have them without trusting in them. Money is power, and men use it. The power of what they forget is it forsakes them when they need it most.

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