

The True Discipleship Broadcast-1983-15 True Discipleship

by William MacDonald

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living a simple lifestyle, being content with what you have, and prioritizing your spiritual growth and relationships with others.

Duration: 24:22

Scripture: 1 Timothy 6:20

Topics: "True Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of a wealthy man named John who lived in a palatial house but was spiritually empty. He had everything money could buy but never prayed, read the Bible, or attended church. On the other hand, there was a poor man named John who lived a humble and faithful life, known as a man of God. One day, the wealthy man received a visit from the poor man, who delivered a message that the richest man in the valley would die at midnight. The wealthy man dismissed it as foolishness but later that night, he received the news of his own father's death. The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking God and finding true joy and fulfillment in Him rather than pursuing worldly possessions.

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 the 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 man 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 the 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. And Paul says godliness with contentment is great gain.

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.

Well, 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. It will advance the kingdom by my keeping it, I'll keep it.

If it'll 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.

There's a story told of a man, another fable, but it's told of a man who found himself in the delectable position that he could have anything he wanted, and so he thought, well I'd like a vast estate, and fresco the vast estate was there. What good's an estate without a mansion on it? So he wished for a mansion, and the mansion was there. Hot and cold folding doors, all the modern conveniences, but what good is that mansion without two or three Cadillacs? They were there, chauffeurs in each Cadillac to take him anywhere he wanted to go, and he was elated at the beginning, but it soon began to paw on him.

After a while he said to an attendant, I want to get out of this. I want to create something. I want to suffer something.

I'd rather be in hell than here, and the attendant said, where do you think you are? And I want to tell you a lot of people in the United States today living in a hell of materialism, and wondering why they're so unhappy. People make frantic dashes to the local shopping malls, and buy thousands of dollars of unneeded gifts that will soon make their way to the garage, or to the attic, or to the local flea market. It says the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.

The love of money. Not money. The love of money.

It's a root of all kinds of evil. Now, in the Greek of the New Testament, this says exactly the same as it says in the English. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.

Literally? Yeah, literally. Adultery? Yeah, adultery. Murder? Yeah.

Sex? Yeah. Fraud? Yeah. Perjury? You name it.

The love of money has led men into every conceivable form of sin. No exception. It says some people eager for money have wandered from the faith, and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Think of some of the griefs that people have who have been eager for money. Okay, they've accumulated it. They live in fear of theft.

They have to buy the most costly security systems, burglar alarms, fences, vaults, and all the rest. You and I don't have to worry about those things. Wealthy people live in fear of members of their family being kidnapped.

They live in fear of blackmail and extortion. They have a terrible sense of insecurity, leading to worry, headaches, ulcers, paranoia. Think of the harmful effect of wealth on children.

They worry about the stock market failing, about banks closing, about inflation, things that are completely beyond their control. I remember George Verwer saying, a rich person never knows how many friends he has. Did you ever think of that? A rich person never knows how many friends he has.

He doesn't know those who are really his friends are those who are playing up to him for what they might get out of it. Wealth is often left to unworthy relatives, and often causes serious conflict in the family. Where there's a will, there's a lot of relatives.

And people that have lived peaceably together all their lives, when a few pieces of antique furniture up for grabs, they'll fight and almost kill one another. You get one of those broken down beds. It's true.

It's absolutely true. These people that we're speaking about are plagued with unrest, with boredom, with dissatisfaction, and with envy. In Greek mythology, there's the fable of a beautiful maiden named Atalanta, and she was famed for her running, and she would only consent to marry a man who could outstrip her in a race, and if he failed, it was death.

So, Hippomenes decided he wanted Atalanta for his wife. Before he started, he went to Aphrodite, and he got three golden apples. And the race started, and as he ran along, he dropped these golden apples along the way, and Atalanta stopped to pick them up, and she lost the race.

The devil is still dropping golden apples along the way. It's the pathway of Christians, and the pathway of those who are determined to make their lives count for God. You stop to pick them up, you lose the race.

I love a story that E. Stanley Jones tells in one of his books. He's on board ship, and he sees two very corpulent persons who are angry with the table stewards, because they didn't give them super service. They seemed to be afraid that they would starve between meals.

If you've ever gone on one of these luxury liners, the food is ridiculous, the way they bring it, you know. Absolutely ridiculous, course after course, and if you don't like it, ask for something else, and they'll bring it to you. Almost anything you could ask.

These people, their physical appetite seemed the one thing that mattered to them. He says, I never saw them reading a book or paper. They sat between meals and scared out, apparently waiting for the next meal.

One night, I saw them sitting thus and staring blankly when a bright idea flashed through the dull brain of the man. He went to the mantelpiece and picked up the vases and looked into them, and then returned to his wife with the news, they're empty. I came very near laughing.

He was right, they're empty, but it wasn't merely the vases. The souls and brains of both of them were empty. They had much in their purses, but nothing in their person.

That was their punishment. What a picture! People pursuing pleasure, wealth, they're empty. Paul says to Timothy, command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant, nor to put their hope in wealth which is so uncertain, and really it is, isn't it? Wealth which is so uncertain.

I've said to you before, this world can offer you no security, none whatever. If you're going to live for God, your only security is God himself. A rich man lived in a palatial house at the top of a hill, and from his window he could look out over the verdant valley, cut up into many farms, and he often said, it's all mine.

He had everything that money could buy, but he was alone. He never bowed his knee in prayer, never read the bible, never visited the local church. His superintendent was a poor man named John, who lived in a small cottage with his wife and children.

Their home was a place of joy and peace. Everyone knew John as a man of God. His voice was often heard in prayer in the local chapel.

One morning at breakfast time, the doorbell rang in the home of this wealthy man, and wondering who it was at this early hour, he unbolted it and saw John standing there rather neatly, and the rich man said, is something wrong with the horses, John? He said, no sir, but may I speak with you for a moment? And so he invited him to come in, and they stood there on the plush carpet of study and contrast, and John said, I felt I had to come to you, sir. He said, I had a vivid dream last night, and I felt you should know about it. The rich man said, what was that, John? Well, he said, God told me last night in a dream that the richest man in the valley would die at midnight tonight.

I hope you're not offended, I just felt you should know. He said, oh John, I'm fine, don't worry, I don't believe in dreams anyway. So, John left and went about his work for the day, saying almost apologetically, well, I just thought I should tell you.

So, the rich man went back and stood looking over his valley. He said, silly old fool, such nonsense, I'm feeling fine. Around ten o'clock, he called his chauffeur and asked him to take him down to the doctor's office, and he had a complete physical.

The doctor said, you're in good shape, I'll give you another 20 years, and the rich man said, well, I thought so. He said, by the way, doctor, could you come by for supper tonight? He said, and afterwards we'll sit by the fire and just have a relaxed visit. Well, the doctor said he could, so they arranged for a supper engagement at 7 p.m. And all day long, the rich man tried to keep himself occupied with business and pleasure, but he couldn't forget the words, the richest man in the valley will die at midnight tonight.

He felt somewhat relieved when the doctor came at seven o'clock. They ate a sumptuous meal and drank liberally, and then they sat at the fire and talked. The doctor tried to leave at 11, but the rich man urged him to stay till midnight.

And he did, and at last the grandfather's clock struck midnight, and the doctor left, and the rich man said to him, you'll never know what it meant to me to have you here. He locked the door and stood on the carpet where John had spoken those ominous words, the richest man in the valley will die at midnight tonight. Silly old fool, I'm feeling fine.

So he went off to bed. At 12.30 the front doorbell rang. He quickly pulled on a dressing gown and went to unlock the door, thinking that the doctor had left something, and in the light he saw a young woman weeping, her head wrapped in a babushka.

What is it? Who are you? The words came with sobs. Mother sent me to tell you that father died at midnight. She felt you should know.

What, John? Oh, I'm so sorry. Tell her I'll be down first thing in the morning. The weeping girl turned away in the darkness.

Slowly he closed the door and stood on the carpet. The cry rose in his heart. Oh God, what a fool I've been.

It was godly John, rich in faith and love and peace, who was to hear the call. He was the richest man in the valley. The way God sees things is quite different from the way the people of the world see it.

It says here, but to put their hope in God, who provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Now, this verse is often used to teach that there's nothing too good for the people of God, that we should swim along in full celestial state, that we should enjoy the very finest gourmet foods, the finest wines, the finest pleasures, have the finest homes, the finest cars. God doesn't.

God provides us richly with all things to enjoy. Well, I think the key to understanding the passage is in that section to enjoy. He provides us richly with all things to enjoy them.

You don't enjoy hoarded wealth. You only enjoy it. The Christian only enjoys it when he puts it to work for the Lord.

So, it's a poor verse, I think, to use for that. It says, command them the rich to do good. Stewardship of our money and material things is one of the most accurate barometers of the spiritual life.

And I got a thrill this morning out of those words. Command them to be rich in good works. Verse 18.

Let them do good that they be rich in good works. I've always said that there were two ways to be rich, and I found a third this morning here in this verse. Rich in the abundance of your possessions, rich in the fewness of your wants.

Now, rich in good works. Isn't that good? Rich in good works. You want to be rich? Do it in good works.

To be generous and willing to share. And he says, in this way they'll lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. Do you get it? The life that is truly life.

The people of this world think that the rich have the life that's truly life. They don't. It's a Christian life, the life that lived, a life of sacrificial discipleship that's truly the good life.

Every once in a while you hear of some Hollywood celebrity taking an overdose of drugs, committing suicide practically. Why? Because they're so happy. Because they found a good life.

If you could talk to them, you'd find that their lives are barren. Freddie Prinze, a young man who had really achieved the top in the entertainment world, had even been invited to the inauguration ball, the gala, in Washington. And you can't go any higher than that.

And then he came to that point in his life, I think it was about 24, and he said, is this all there is? Is this what it is? And one day he reached down beside the sofa, pulled out a revolver, and put it to his head, and ended it all. Howard Hughes. When he died, it was estimated that his wealth amounted to \$2,500,000,000.

As a young man, good-looking, dashing young man, rose in the financial world to own huge corporations, huge Hughes Aircraft, TWA, and many, many others. And when he died, he was a mental and a physical wreck, living a wasted, useless, unhappy life. The story came out in Time Magazine.

I remember tearing it out of time, so I'd never forget it. One of the saddest lives I think I've ever read. How much was he worth? Well, he was worth \$2,500,000,000, but it wasn't very much.

I like this verse 19 of our chapter, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come that they may lay hold on the life that is life indeed. Life that is truly life. You want a good life? Live, but not for material things.

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