

RAISING MY STANDARD OF LIV... GIVING, 1TIM.6:17-19

The Treasure Principle #3

◆Intro: I remember it still pretty clearly. We were nosing around in my uncle's garage with my cousin Mark. There parked neatly parallel to the family car was a real, "live", modern camper. You know, the pop-down, pull-out, or throw-up kind (there must be a nicer way to describe it). Clean, smooth, and neatly compact. Our family had a camper too. I never really thought too much of it. It was ancient. I think it came from one of the World Wars. Had a tent top, not a hard one. No pull outs. Plain, unpainted aluminum. We piled so much junk on top when traveling that it looked like a bloated camel with a tarp and bungy straps for a cover. Looking at our uncle's camper we knew one thing: they were *rich!*

◆**1. Are you rich?** Because today the Scripture has some special things to say to rich people, so if you're not rich, I think there's coffee in the back. But before you leave would you pause just long enough to ask the question: Am I rich?

◆Here's the reason. See, Paul in our text is writing to a young pastor, Timothy, encouraging him to command the rich 1) not to hope in wealth, and 2) to hope in God, and 3) to be rich, but not in money, rather rich in good actions. But you see, if we are not rich, then we don't have to pay attention, technically, do we? So before we count ourselves out of hoping in God instead of our IRA, and being rich in good deeds, lets wonder together if we are in fact rich.

◆A. Eight percent or less of people in the world have a car. Are you kidding? Some of the families in my boys' schools drive Lambos, and Bugattis! So there you are with your '95 Civic feeling a little thin, but statistically 92% of the people in the world don't have any car!

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◆ Some years ago in my former church we got to wondering how much the vehicles we as a church family drove were worth. So we sent a professional appraisers to survey the parking lot on Sunday. Here's what we found:

- ◆ 70% of our vehicles were younger than six years old.
- ◆ Estimated bluebook value of our parking lot was \$1.6 million.
- ◆ Since cars loose over half their sale price in 2-3 years, we figured there were over \$3 million sitting on our pavement.

◆ I doubt this church is all that dissimilar. Are we rich?

◆ B. Safe drinking water is not accessible for 2.2 billion people. Does anyone here have safe drinking water? We wash our cares, water our lawns, and flush our toilets all with potable water. But in our culture we hesitate to drink from a hose, preferring to buy water in little plastic bottles that we could get right out of our sink. It's a naturally occurring substance that many Americans will pay \$2/bottle for. I bring it up only because I was wondering, are we rich?

◆ C. People living in shanty towns or slums are estimated at 700 million, with 120 million children living on the streets. [show pix of Lima, Peru] I was just wondering how we're doing. If you are like most folks around our town you probably have a home with 6 or 7 cozy, weather-protected rooms. Some of us even have rooms we don't use! We just look at them. We buy stuff to put in them so that when we look at them they don't look empty. Some of these rooms we never use although they have all the niceties humans might want if they were to enter them. In the Dutch Chicago subculture they are called, who knows why, "frunchrooms". Presumably

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the President will sit there if he ever visits. I was just wondering, if any of us were, well you know, ...rich.

◆D. Statistics tell us that about one third of the world, 2 billion people, live in poverty surviving on less each day than that \$2 we pay for a bottle of water. We haven't even factored in lattes yet! Thirty million die of hunger annually, over half of which are under the age of five (18 million).

Meanwhile a large number of our culture work hard at not eating, and trying to lose weight. Are you starting to think we might be rich?

◆They say that America has 6% of the world's population and 40% of the world's wealth. Expert estimate that with \$20 billion we could provide water and basic health care to the whole world. That's how much American's spend on ice cream in one year!

◆I'm not trying to make anyone here feel guilty about those carmel cappuccinos at Star Bucks. I'm not saying you gotta scoop water out of the gutters to boil and drink. That's not the point of all this. I'm just wondering if any of us around here are rich. God doesn't say "no" to enjoyment. It's just that he says "yes" to our generosity. If you and I can see that indeed we are rich, then we have all the more reason to pay attention to what the scriptures say to rich people. Satan's tactics are to make us look at ourselves and feel average, forgetting that in our society, even below average folks have far more than most of the world. The things we throw away, and are tired of would be more than accepted by others.

◆I think now we are ready to ask our second question.

◆**2. Do you know why you are rich?** Here are some possible answers:

◆Because I'm especially good.

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- ◆ So I can enjoy the latest gadget and a new phone every 2 years.
 - ◆ So I can take care of myself without being burden to anyone else (ie. so that I don't need community or God.)
 - ◆ So I can pull my weight in the world and society.
 - ◆ Because God wants me to be happy.
- ◆ You have probably guessed already that none of these are quality answers to the purpose of our wealth. Our text, however, does tell us specifically why God gives us the material blessings he does.

◆ *“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will 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.” 1 Timothy 6:17-19, NIV.*

- ◆ I see a handful of reasons and purposes here:
- ◆ 1. God provides because he cares about our enjoyment.
 - ◆ 2. God blesses us in order that we may “do good”, “be rich in good deeds”, “be generous”, and be “willing to share”.
 - ◆ 3. God blesses us so that we can build on it into real, lasting, eternal life (“lay up a treasure...for the coming age”).
- ◆ **A.** At the center of these reasons is the one that receives most of Paul's attention, being stated in no less than four different ways. So let's think on it. The treasure principle: God prospers me not to raise my standard of

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living, but to raise my standard of giving. You see, God isn't saying, "How could you THINK of ever drinking a frappe?" He is saying, "How can you be wealthy enough to drink a frappe, and still not share!? I have given you the ability to do both! Your drink is evidence of this fact!"

◆ In the Bible whenever God blesses people it is so that they in turn can be a blessing to others. Observe...

◆ *"The LORD had said to Abram, "...I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ...and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."* Genesis 12:1-3, NIV.

◆ *"Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."* 2 Corinthians 9:10,11, NIV.

◆ You and I are given wealth in order to the work of God's kingdom. That's the long and the short of it. God may distribute his wealth unequally, but not because he loves one or another more or less than the next fellow. God distributes unequally according to such things as need, ability to manage, but mostly I think he does it to produce human love, seen in the giving and receiving from one another. He wants HIS gifts to come to us THROUGH the hands of his family.

◆ *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in*

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all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows." 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, NIV.

◆**B.** How do we bless others with our wealth? We share it. For Christians this has always been called the "tithe", or the "tenth". Same word. This is the biblical starting place. Some folks think of it as an ending place but it was never so in the OT or the NT. The tithe is the starting block of biblical giving, not the finish line. It's the floor, not the ceiling. The tithe was meant to be like training wheels, to help us learn to ride the bike of generosity.

But after that comes the hills, sidewalks, and bike-X adventures of sharing.

◆OT hebrews actually had 3 different tithes amounting to about 25% of their income, not to mention what the Bible calls "offerings" which are above and beyond the tithe. What about modern, Lafayette Christians? What do you suppose we do? Well, I haven't statistics for our immediate area, but I can tell you this. Surveys continue to show that in America, the wealthiest of nations, those who call themselves Christian also say they share about 2-3% of their income.

◆Furthermore, it is not uncommon for a third of the members of a church to not give anything at all toward it's operation. All I can say to that is, "Can you imagine what we could do around here if we all practiced the biblical minimum of sharing one tenth? Marriages that needed counseling but didn't pursue it because it cost money, could do so. And maybe more families would stay in tact with a mom and a dad. People who wanted to serve in Peru but couldn't raise the

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money could do so. Somebody gets an idea of a new ministry, say, a skateboarding ministry or a motorcycle ministry and BAMM, we make it happen. Wanna put on a marriage seminar, or a cooking class free for the public? No problem, because God's people share!

◆ **Conclusion:** Finally then, what does Paul tell us will result from our being people who are "rich in good deeds"? Did you notice phrases reminiscent of things Jesus said? How about, "lay up treasure for themselves...for the coming age."? Sounds like what Jesus said in Matthew 6, doesn't it?

◆ "But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:20, 21, NIV.

◆ Remember the underlying Treasure Principle we've been working with? *"You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead."* This is not about getting ourselves off the hook by giving a little cash to a cause. This is not about getting a big mansion in heaven. Why would stuff be our goal in heaven if it's not our goal here? It's not stuff or money that makes real life.

◆ This is really about how you view your life and purpose on this earth, and who the ultimate owner is. God is telling us here that real life is found in giving of ourselves somehow. I was walking down the hall at St Vincent's hospital in Indy this past week when I noticed a plaque dedicated to Sister Elizabeth Ann Seton who started the Daughters of Charity order in the US in 1850. There was an interesting quote on the plaque that read "To enjoy we must love, and to love we must sacrifice." Sounds a lot like scriptural

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wisdom, doesn't it? "It is more blessed to give than receive." le. If you want to enjoy blessing, give, sacrifice.

◆ Are we rich? If you're living in America you're rich. Why are we rich? So that we are the ones who can be generous in good deeds. We are blessed in order to be a blessing.

◆ *"For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*
Ephesians 2:10, NIV.