LIVING THE OBEDIENT & SURRENDERED LIFE

We Win: Taking Hold of Life Indeed

Paul commands affluent believers to #1 – Anchor your hope on the Rock; #2 – Share your abundance with others; #3 – Enjoy your reward of generosity in this life and in the next.

I Timothy 6:17-19, as plainly as any place in scripture, makes it abundantly clear what those who possess surplus, material prosperity are to do with their prosperity and why. Here, the Apostle Paul instructs young 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, 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, (NIV) so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed (NASB).*

Paul knows that the successful accumulation of wealth does not automatically make one spiritually wise, biblically learned, or even morally good. Holders of substantial material possessions require spiritual direction in addressing their circumstances just as much as those who are materially poor. The directives are different, but both are equally needed. Paul, in the strongest language ("command them"), directs Timothy in what the prosperous are to be doing with their prosperity. Paul emphasizes three important points in his commands to those with surplus possessions. Paul emphasizes three important points in his commands to those with surplus possessions.

Anchor Your Hope

Paul indicates that there are two places people can anchor their hope for this life and the next – either in the *provided* or in the *Provider*. You can place your hope in your stuff or you can place your hope in the One who provides you with the stuff (Deuteronomy 8:18). If your hope is in your possessions, you have anchored your hope to an uncertain security. Proverbs 23:5 (NIV) warns, "*Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle*." Putting your hope in your stuff is like putting your hope in the wings of a bird.

The words of a great old hymn says it best, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness… On Christ the solid Rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand." As Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:24), "*No one can serve (put their hope in) two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money*." Anchoring our hope in God leads us to humility. Anchoring our hope in our possessions leads to pride. And we know God hates pride. (See Proverbs 6:16-17.)

Share Your Abundance

The advantage of possessing material riches is that it enables its possessors to become rich in an additional way – in good deeds. In the same way they have been successful in *accumulating* their wealth, the affluent should also strive to be successful in generously *sharing* their wealth. It is the privilege and the responsibility of the wealthy to do so.

I have long appreciated the enduring truth of Proverbs 11:25,"…*he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed*." Generosity is never one-sided. The giver is refreshed by the giving as much as the receiver is refreshed by the receiving. It is a double blessing – both are refreshed in the act. In other words, he who seeks to improve the lives of others will himself have his own life improved.

This truth is entirely counter-intuitive to our human nature (as is all of the Christian life). We discover that if we are hungry and go feed someone else who is hungry, we will be filled. If we are cold and give our blanket to someone else who is cold, we will be warmed. If we are discouraged and give our attention to someone else who is discouraged, we will be encouraged. In the world's material economy, none of this makes any sense. But in God's spiritual economy, it is the way to finding life indeed. By shifting our focus from inward to outward, we allow the lights of heaven to come on and brighten our day.

Paul knows that generosity is the antidote to the spiritually debilitating disease of "affluenza" which is so easily contracted in a materialistic culture like ours. That is why Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:20 that the way to avoid this dreaded disease is to *store up for yourselves treasures in heaven* by sharing your surplus with those who have a shortfall. To disobey this command to be generous will result in what Solomon observed of the ungenerous affluent, *There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt* (Ecclesiastes 5:13, NASB). It is really a very simple principle: Share, you keep. Keep, you lose.

What may be the hardest part of this command is that Paul orders the affluent to not only be generous with their material wealth, but also to be generous with themselves—to be rich in good deeds. They are to generously give of themselves. It is not enough to just write a check to meet needs. Paul is commanding the wealthy to get personally involved in meeting needs.

Enjoy Your Reward

Paul tells us that if we focus on converting our temporal material wealth into eternal spiritual wealth, we will find a great reward in this life and in the next. Jesus instructs us in Luke 16:9 (NIV), *I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings*. By doing so, you are converting temporal material wealth into eternal relationships. Jesus tells us that one day we will be separated from our wealth. So the wise man will invest that wealth while he has it to produce eternal relationships that he will be able to enjoy forever.

C. S. Lewis said it this way, "Aim at heaven, and you will get earth thrown in; aim at earth and you will get neither." Are we working to convert our temporal material wealth into eternal spiritual wealth? Paul tells us that by being generous, we are laying up treasures for ourselves.

Do we really believe what Paul is saying? If we do, why would we not gladly and zealously obey this command to be generous?

Paul makes one final, powerful point regarding enjoying the reward for obedience. Our earthly generosity becomes the building material with which God will lay a firm foundation for us in heaven. If we want a mansion in heaven, we need to be sending on ahead the needed construction materials by our generosity in this life.

What we keep or consume for ourselves in this life stays in this life. What we share of what we have and who we are with others—what we generously give—we are sending on ahead for our heavenly enjoyment forever. We are blessed by giving, others are blessed by receiving, and we are blessed again in glory with a reward that is proportionate to our earthly generosity. Talk about a win-win-win deal.

Our time on this planet can never fully provide us with life indeed. It is at best a cheap imitation of the real thing. As the old hillbilly would say, "Ya ain't seen nothin' yet!" The best is undoubtedly yet to come. So, Paul is commanding affluent believers to #1—Anchor your hope on the Rock; #2—Share your abundance with others; #3—Enjoy your reward of generosity in this life and in the next. Remember I John 5:3, *This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.* As the old hymn says, "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey."

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. Why are we foolish to put our hope in our material possessions?

2. Why do you think anchoring our hope in God leads to humility versus anchoring our hope in our possessions, which leads to pride?

3. Why might it be harder for us to be generous with our time than with our money? What do we lose if all our giving is just of our stuff and rarely of us?

4. Review Ecclesiastes 5:13, "There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt" and discuss how you see Solomon's observation as true in today's culture as well back in 900 BC?

5. Why should it encourage us so much to know that what we give of our life and our possessions in this life will be returned to us in the next?

6. How do you respond to the idea of "Share – you keep. Keep – you lose."

7. Share some of other ways we can be generosity with things other than money?

8. Discuss the significance of C. S. Lewis's statement, "Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither."

9. What is going to change in your life going forward because of this lesson? What are you going to start doing differently?