

## **1 TIMOTHY 6:17-19**

*(Reading: Matt.6:19-34; Prov.3:1-18)*

### **Be Really Rich!**

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Many of us will know of the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century Reformed Baptist English preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

He was blessed to have a tremendous ministry in London, with an extensive publishing and mercy ministry as well.

One thing that Spurgeon is particularly known for nowadays is in his illustrations and sharp short sayings.

He could succinctly sum up doctrine and practice in just a few words.

One of these sayings goes like this: "The devil's last defence is a Christian's wallet!"

Well, how dissecting isn't that?

That really exposes what has to be one of the most prominent stumbling blocks in a believer's life.

I mean, who could forget what the Lord Jesus said to that rich young ruler.

The man who followed all the commandments so precisely.

And, yet, when it came to the crunch, he was as empty and as ungodly as anyone else.

For when Christ told him to go and sell all he had, and follow Him, he couldn't!

You see, he was a very rich man.

This was the danger Agur in Proverbs 30 warned of.

He asked not to be rich because then he might disown the Lord and live completely without Him.

And wasn't this same subject of being rich what the apostle had already spoken about earlier in this same chapter?

Didn't we read just before the text in verse 10 about the love of money being the cause of all kinds of evil?

Mind you, there is a difference in the verses 17 till 19 from what's said earlier in the chapter and from what I've mentioned in connection with Agur and the rich young ruler.

That difference is that in those cases we see the negative aspect of being wealthy.

They are how wealth can bring you down.

And while it might seem at first this passage goes the same way, these verses are actually about how wealth can be used positively.

Thus it is that we come to verse 17.

For here we are exhorted to **BE RICH IN GOD ALONE.**

Our first point.

Now Paul has a specific group within the Ephesian church in mind here.

This is addressed to those there who are well off.

So it would not have been everyone.

But as soon as anyone else became rich then these words were for them also.

And so these verses come to us today also.

For who among us cannot say that at this time we are not rich in this present world?

We are among those of the believers through all the ages of church history who are definitely well off!

We don't often realise that, do we?

But that's why this passage this afternoon is exactly for us.

When verse 17 begins, "Command those who are rich in this present world," we certainly cannot say we are poor can we?

So let's see what this is telling us.

And in doing that we must note that we are not to be arrogant or to put our hope in wealth.

You see, that's what being rich can do.

It can make us think that somehow it's about us.

As one African proverb says about a rich man, "He is a self-made man and worships his own maker!"

Did you get that?

A rich person can fall into the trap of thinking he has done it himself.

That's what we heard earlier from Agur's words in Proverbs 30.

There can be a 'high-and-mightiness' in those who have much more than most people.

But that's the last attitude there should be in any Christian.

As Paul goes on to say, wealth is very uncertain.

Aside from the fact that you cannot take with you when you die you can lose it on this earth in quite a hurry.

This was the point of the parable Jesus told about the rich man who built the bigger barn.

That foolish man thought he could tear down his barns and build a much bigger one and so take life easy and eat, drink and be merry.

But, as Luke 12 verse 20 says, that very night God took his life from him.

And then what good was all his ambitious plans and accumulated wealth?

This world's wealth is so uncertain verse 17 says.

So why do you want to put your trust in it?

Wouldn't it be far better to put your trust in something that always gives a good return?

Thus it is verse 17 tells us to place our hope in God "who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

There is a harking back here to the contentment of verse 6.

But there's also something more.

You see, in their position of being rich they can actually glorify the Lord.

Just as widows in the previous chapter, verse 5, are told to put their hope in God and continue night and day to pray and ask God for help, so too can the one in the most opposite social position.

Congregation, this happens when you recognise God as the One who gives you everything.

For when you appreciate what you have as a trust from Him it makes all the difference to your life – and the lives of those around you!

Notice the way the apostle has a play on words here.

He speaks to those whom he describes as rich by telling them about the God who richly gives.

So they – and we – are not rich for ourselves.

We are rich for what we can do to serve God right here and now!

Sometimes there can be resentment within churches against those who are rich.

It's almost as though it's evil to be rich.

But the Lord never says that.

Rather, He speaks of how we use what we have.

He desires that in the gifts He's given us that we bring Him the glory.

And that includes our wealth.

You see, the Lord has made some to be rich.

He makes certain Christians better off so that they can be a blessing through using their money the right way.

And He's also given it to those certain people because He knows they can use it the right way!

But will they?

A good question.

And, you know, it's only one that you can answer!

Because are you putting your hope in God?

This is not the hope this world speaks of.

This is not the 'I hope it works out' when you know it probably won't!

Rather, this is the hope which is as solid as a rock.

Indeed, this rock is the 'Rock of Ages' - no one less than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!  
This is faith in the Saviour.

And so it is we come to the second aspect of the text this afternoon.  
This point tells us to **DO RICH BY SHOWING GOD ALONE.**

Here we come to the teaching of verse 18.

And, like verse 17, this verse begins with a command.

A command Timothy – and all preachers – must declare to God's people who are blessed materially.

And it's the command that they must do good, be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

We meet the word 'good' in this context a number of times in the pastoral epistles.

Titus 2 and 3 similarly commands all the people in the church to do this 'good'.

There is the good Christian women are to do, which 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2 and 5 declare.

Then in Titus 2:7 church leaders are told to do good.

And now rich believers are told this.

They too must be godly for this is what this 'good' is.

Notice again the play on words.

These people must be 'rich' in good deeds.

They must be busy helping those who are not rich – the poor.

It's not hard to imagine why Paul does this.

Rich people naturally separate themselves from others.

They mix in different circles, they live in different suburbs, and so they can even believe they were meant to be a class apart.

We do the same today in the disparaging way we talk about those people who are 'trailer trash'.

That's an American term for those living in substandard or very cheap housing.

But that description says it all.

Rich people can have a certain negative view on others.

And that's a view reinforced by the way many of them may have operated before in business before their conversion.

Then they would always have been looking for the next marketing opportunity.

And that would invariably involve how they could get more out of people.

Something quite different than looking to give to people as being rich in good deeds says.

Next, Paul goes on to say they must be “generous and willing to share.”

Not so hard, is it?

Well, if you know a rich man, these are actually the very hardest things!

He didn't get to be rich by giving his money away!

I remember when I was a Newspaper delivery boy in the city of Nelson, where I grew up.

It was a time when we ourselves had to go around and collect the money for the newspaper subscription from the people who received the local paper.

My brothers and I had one of the poorer areas in town, down in the valley.

And I always wondered what it would be like to have one of the richer areas.

Especially the one right on top of Princes' Drive, with the million dollar views over the harbour and out towards the mountains.

That was until I had the opportunity to meet the boy who had that newspaper run.

And then we got to talking.

And we talked about what kind of tips and gifts we each had received for Christmas.

You know, we had received four times as much money for tips and heaps more gifts than he got!

The rich didn't get rich by giving it away, let me assure you that!

We can be fooled by the same in the church too.

When a congregation is being blessed through generous offerings you naturally think it's coming from the richer folk.

But I was reminded of the real truth when it was the richest man in one congregation who was always constantly surprised at how well our congregation then was giving.

I didn't really think much of what he said then.

But it did strike me later that he shouldn't have been so surprised given how much his tithe would have been!

So imagine what a difference it would make if rich Christians did give proportionately!

If they were generous and willing to share what an impact that would have!

And this is by no means speaking about suddenly giving everything over to the church.

This is not the drastic step of selling up and giving the lot to the Lord.

Rather it would be like what Robert Laidlaw in New Zealand did.

For when he began in business he committed himself to giving ten per cent of everything he made to Christian charities.

This is what he said about the practice of tithing: “From the earliest stage of my business, I tithed and received God's blessing and wisdom.

“But, at the same time I knew from the parable of the seeds that the Lord wishes our crop to be bountiful so it blesses him but it is a sin to harvest the crop too early, so initially my tithes were small and gifts of love and I felt God's blessing on my work.

“Later, when my business was a success my tithes were bountiful and I was blessed again.”

Laidlaw founded the Farmers Trading Company, one of the largest department stores in New Zealand.

And his giving was such a blessing that the New Zealand Bible College was renamed in his memory as Laidlaw College.

Mind you, that’s something I don’t think he wouldn’t have been happy about!

Congregation, faithful rich Christians put others first, especially the Lord.

They see what they have as a trust, not an affirmation of who they are.

And they certainly don’t see what they have as a result of following certain ‘health and wealth’ teachings.

The last thing they do is push a terrible guilt trip on you.

They are truly humble people.

And so they show us the meaning of the next verse in the text this afternoon – verse 19.

For that verse declares to us, **BE RICH BECAUSE YOUR TREASURE’S IN GOD ALONE.**

Our third point.

Here we see pictured the completely opposite image to the one verse 17 began with.

While there we saw those who are rich in this present world now we are shown those laying up treasure in the world to come.

This is an echo of what Paul has said to the deacons earlier in verse 13 of chapter 3.

There it is also clear that sacrificial giving of ourselves and what we have for Christ’s cause will always be rewarded, in this age and the one to come!

This is the spirit the Lord urges upon us in Matthew 6.

There we heard that we’re not to be caught up in the things here below but put our trust in God up above.

When what we treasure is Him then our hearts and what do will show that.

As verse 33 says there, when we seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness we will get everything we need – and much, much more besides!

Those who are rich towards others are laying a good foundation for the coming age.

They are doing the right thing, which pleases God.

And because it pleases God they will be rewarded in heaven for their good actions.

That’s taking hold of the life that’s truly life, as verse 19 concludes.

That brings eternity into this temporal time.

That is a foretaste of paradise right now.

Now, we must be careful not to get confused with good works here.

This doesn't give us credit with God.

No amount of giving to charity can earn us brownie points with the Lord.

But it is bringing out who is in our hearts by faith.

This was what Christ Jesus had prayed for His own in John 17.

In verse 3 there He prays to His Heavenly Father, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

This is also what Paul spoke of to Titus.

In that letter, chapter 3 verse 5, he wrote that the Saviour saved us, not because of righteous things we've done, but because of His mercy.

Jesus saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

Dear believer, do you remember what Jesus told us in Matthew 25 about those who would be going into heaven?

There are two groups of people pictured there.

And at first it seems it could be hard telling them apart.

But because of what those in one of those two groups did **for the Lord** there is all the difference between them.

When the King there says, "whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me," he brings out where they stand before Him.

Because those who are His own are like Him, for He is Christ the King.

Congregation, this is the believer who has time for anyone at all – big or small.

It's what was shown when several Reformed elders went to that same Robert Laidlaw I spoke about earlier.

That was in the early years of the denomination's existence in New Zealand.

They went to present a particular need to him, as they were so poor at that point.

He gladly received them.

And he helped them.

Because what he had wasn't his – it was the Lord's!

Friend, are you taking hold of life that way?

Are you planting paradise in your own back yard?

Instead of your wallet being the devil's last defence is it actually part of the Lord's offence against him?

It's when you live looking to the Lord that you look forward to being rewarded on the new heavens and the new earth.

Wasn't this what Paul spoke of at the end of his second letter to Timothy?

There he said in verse 8 of chapter 4, “There is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Dear friend, BE REALLY RICH!

Be the Lord’s today and every day.

And be the Lord’s in every possible kind of way.

As John Bunyan once said, “A man there was, and they called him mad; the more he gave, the more he had.”

How much isn’t this foolishness to the world!

But it is the wisdom of God!

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let’s pray...

O Lord God, You are the possessor and giver of all things!

From You comes all we have.

And especially don’t we know that in Your best gift of all – the doing and dying of Your Son for our sin.

We thank You for all You have done for us.

How truly rich You have made us.

And having given us so much help us to give it back to You with the same spirit You first gave it to us.

That’s the spirit which full of love.

The love for the unloveable.

May all that we think and say and do be such an offering to You.

Through Jesus Christ, who perfectly showed us this way, we pray.

Amen.