

Sermon on Hebrews 13:1-6
Pastor David Wietzke
22nd Sunday after Pentecost (B)
October 21, 2018



Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

"Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

So we say with confidence,

"The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Hebrews 13:1-6)

We all have our weak points when it comes to our attitudes about money. But our weak points are not all the same.

That might be the challenging thing about the readings we have for this Sunday and how to apply them to a group of you gathered together. Because you are not all the same. Your financial situations and place in life are very different. Not only that, but we each have our own areas of weakness when it comes to God's will in these areas. All of them are sinful, but they're not all the same.

Some people may struggle with jealousy. They look at those who are wealthy and are filled with bitterness as they say to themselves, "I worked just as hard as those people, why should they have more than I do?" When it comes to their attitude toward God they are angry that God hasn't given them what they think they deserve.

Others are more like that rich young man in today's Gospel. He wasn't jealous but proud--proud of himself and his obedience to God; he had a lot of money and probably felt that he deserved it. But when Jesus told him to give up his affluent lifestyle to follow his Lord that thought was more than he could bear. Might we be more like him that we'd like to admit?

We could add more problems: there's sinful worrying, sinful hoarding, wasteful spending, cutthroat dealing and outright stealing. The sinful nature can show itself in many ways, but the book of Hebrews simply declares to all of us, **"Keep your lives free from the love of money."** That applies to all of us--whether we are envious or proud, rich or poor. But how do we do that? The writer reminds us of some wonderful truths to help free us from our natural love of material things and get our love focused where it belongs--on our loving heavenly Father and his Son Jesus Christ.

I. Keep your lives free from money-love by remembering God's great salvation

"Keep your lives free from the love of money." Maybe the first thing we need to do as we think about those words is to actually realize that the love of money is something that is evil. This maybe does not occur to us at all, because our society has basically declared that the love of money is as normal as breathing. Greed is not evil, the world declares, it's just the normal state of affairs.

But how can it not be wrong to love the gift more than the Giver? Or to be angry that he hasn't given us more? Or to forget to worship him altogether because we are too busy enjoying or trying to acquire his earthly gifts? Or to lie and cheat and steal and cut corners just to get a little more for ourselves? How can it not be evil to only think about our own well-being at the expense of everyone else? After we have come to know Jesus, how can we continue to think and act as if the world's greed and selfishness is somehow OK in the eyes of God, OK for us to act just as those who don't know God at all?

And yet we have a God who says to sinners, **"Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you."** We have a God of whom we can say, **"The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid."** Why should God be a helper to sinners who love houses and cars more than their Creator? Because he's a God of love. We have a God who helped us by forgiving us for Jesus' sake, who send a Savior to pay for the guilt we incurred by our greed, a Savior who came down from heaven and lived a life of earthly poverty as part of the suffering needed to atone for us, before he willingly gave his life on a cross.

How could we ever keep our lives free from the love of money without faith in Jesus? Jesus taught in one of his sermons, *"Do not store up treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal; rather store up treasures in heaven."* (Matthew 6:19-20) If this world is all there is, then why wouldn't we want to make enjoying it our goal? But with God's eternal salvation in view...with his promise of a life to come that is infinitely more wonderful than life here could be, no matter what you could buy or own; why should we obsess over what will perish?

The only way to fight the greed that is within is to look at God's own wonderful promises to you. Most of all are his heavenly promises. But we also look at the promises he makes for our lives on earth. "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" So much of greed is really based on fear. Money is the protection people seek against bad times and bad people. Money is the protection against being out on the street with nothing. God surely wants us to be responsible and use what he's given us; but he himself is our real protector, he is the one to whom we turn when we are afraid of the future, trusting that he loves us not because of our money but because of his grace in Jesus Christ.

II. Keep your lives free from money-love by remembering God's generous, daily supply

That's the other truth we need to remember to keep us our lifestyles free from an obsession with money. "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have." Literally, "what is already present." We can combat the love of money by better appreciating what God has given us already.

That doesn't just mean adding up the dollars and cents in your account. God has provided so much more! What about the people in your life who care for you? What about the nation and place in which we live--with a high degree of safety from those who would rob, steal and murder? What about the public servants, elected and appointed, who work to try to secure safety, prosperity and opportunity? What about Christian friends and fellowship that we enjoy here at Crown of Life? God's goodness is so evident in many ways.

And even if we look at earthly things--I know we are all blessed differently but there aren't many of us, I think, who wouldn't say that we still have a whole lot more than most people on earth. An American with average income is wealthier than well over 90% of the world's population as a whole.¹ I know "costs of living" are varied but still...If you have a nice bed to sleep in, heat and air conditioning, a vehicle or access to good transportation, a bank account--you're already richly blessed even in terms of earthly comparisons.

Now, let's not make the mistake that some have made, that we equate God's earthly gifts with his spiritual favor; as if those who had more were loved more by God and those who don't have as much are loved less. There are lots of Bible stories that show us quite the opposite. As Jesus warned in more than one of his parables, there are lots of people with comfortable and affluent lives on earth who are tragically sliding straight to hell. The point for us is that when we look at how richly God provides for us all the time, we can free ourselves from fear and greed and instead trust his promise that he will keep on taking care of us in the future.

What peace we can enjoy every day--most of all from knowing we are God's forgiven children, knowing we have a God who provides on earth and will bring us safely home. And then what? The writer reminds us of some things we can do once we are set free from fear and greed. ***Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*** (The writer is probably thinking here of the story of Abraham, who did this very thing in Genesis chapter 18). ***Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.***

¹ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/09/how-americans-compare-with-the-global-middle-class/>. Retrieved on 10/16/18.

We can remember the hurting. We can help even people that we don't know personally. We can be generous in our giving to the Lord and to others. And we can care for one another.

Conclusion

A young American from an affluent background was traveling in foreign countries to try to learn about the world. He had decided to try to ask one child in each country what it was they wanted more than anything else in the world. When he asked that question to a boy begging in India, the youngster thought hard before saying the last thing the American expected: "A pencil." He wanted a pencil more than anything else so that he could get an education and learn.

On the other end of the spectrum, did you know that lottery winners are more than twice as likely to file for bankruptcy than the general population?

You see, it's not about how much you have. It's about your heart. It's ultimately about knowing that you have a God that you can trust. Trust that what he's given you is enough because the one who gave it to you loves you for Jesus' sake and wants you to have exactly what's right for you. Trust that God will never leave you or forsake you. And trust that he will one day bring you home. Your heavenly Father loves you! You can count on him! Amen.