

The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
1 Timothy 6:6 – 19  
Rev Joseph Highley  
(transcribed from his sermon on Sunday September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2022)

Grace mercy and peace to you from God, our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

You can't take it with you. You can't take it with you. One of my favorite quotes I've ever heard is, "You will never see a U-Haul following a hearse." Doesn't matter how much or how little you acquire. You can't take it with you. So cling to Jesus. It's all about Jesus.

Our sermon text for this week is first Timothy chapter six verses six through 19, though you'll notice that there is this theme of riches throughout all of our readings this morning. As I mentioned last week, which the text was in first Timothy as well, first Timothy is a letter from the apostle Paul to one of his young disciples, Timothy. Its purpose is to clarify points of doctrine, issues of struggle that Timothy faces in his congregation and also give him encouragement and guidance on what it means to be a pastor and really, truly, what it means to be a Christian. Thus, it readily applies to each of us, pastor or not as well. This reading from first Timothy six is at the very end of the letter to Timothy. These words of Paul to Timothy are his parting shots, his last points of emphasis for the young man. Since we know that all scriptures is the work of the Holy Spirit, it's God's message to you. So let's dive into our topic this morning. I encourage you to have your Bibles handy for first Timothy chapter six will be there all morning.

Thing I always hear when it comes to baseball, I love baseball, is that basically owners are willing to put up with whatever nonsense changes to the game that anyone wants to throw at them. I am a baseball traditionalist, so if it was up to me, the game would never, ever change. Instead they do these updates, like adding a runner automatically to second base at the start of each inning, if the game goes into extra innings. I hate it. That's ridiculous. I want 20 innings of baseball and you don't get that with that rule. For the most part, the owners, they just don't care. What they do care about is when someone attacks their wallet. If you attack their wallet, suddenly you have their attention and there might be a strike or a lockout.

I think that's actually the case with most of us. You may call us names and that may hurt. We may get depressed. You may mess with our schedules and we really don't like that, but where we're really going to have problems is if you start messing with my stuff. If you mess with my wallet, then we've got problems. It's my stuff. It's not yours. As humans this is ingrained in us at a very, very, very, very, very, very, very young age. One of Ellie's probably second or third words that she learned was mine. Mine. Mine. Mine. I was really impressed that she learned that one. Got it down. When you have an older sibling, that's less than two years older than you, you've got to be protective of your stuff pretty early on. That's 99% of James and Ellie's fights, is over who stuff it is and who gets to have it right now. Really, this is ingrained in all of us and our very nature.

The Bible talks about riches and money and possessions; the physical things of this creation and how we as humans place them ahead of God, probably as much, if not more than, any other topic. It's just the reality of the world that we live in. It's one of the things that the devil attacks us with over and over. It's been noted though, that here in first Timothy chapter six, first 10, it doesn't specifically say that money is the root of all evil. I mean, that would be like saying that spoons are the root of me gaining weight over the past year. It does say the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. This is still a serious deal. This isn't just Pastor up here on his high horse, talking about how we shouldn't love money. All right, tune out. He's almost done. Maybe. Hopefully.

No, we have to take this seriously. We can't just say, well, no, I'm not actually that rich. I'm actually poor compared to the others around me. We can't just say my money and possessions don't really affect me or have that much sway over me. We don't get to get off that easy. This is such a serious situation that it has literally caused people to lose their faith. It says so right there in verse 10. So this morning we are going to take this seriously.

Our first point is a simple one and it's the point I've already made. It says it right there in verse seven. "For, we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world." You can't take it with you. You will never see a U-Haul following a hearse.

Years ago, archeologists started unearthing Egyptian tombs with the pharaohs and royalty and mummies. Their tombs were adorned with gold and riches and all sorts of trinkets. Their places of burial were just splendid. They were incredible. And guess what? They didn't take any of it with them. It's still just sitting there out in the Egyptian desert or in some museum.

We work and we strive and we focus and we fight to acquire more. We've always got to get more, more, more. Acquiring more wealth. Acquiring more prestige and honor and recognition and security and in the end you can't take any of it with you. Fame, honor. Can't take it with you. Influence, savings, fortune. Can't take it with you. You are stripped completely bare in death. You brought nothing into this world and you will take nothing out. Now those are all things that we know readily that tempt us from and draw us away from God.

Those are all things that are either explicitly or implicitly mentioned in our reading from first Timothy. Possessions, money, that sort of thing. It's all right there. What about this? That's not in the reading. What about the good that you do? Can you take that with you? I want to tell a story to illustrate this.

It was a beautiful, bright and glorious day up in heaven at the pearly gates. I suppose every day at heaven's a beautiful, bright and glorious day. It's always sunny in heaven. Unless you like the rain, then maybe it's raining. St. Peter is standing there at the pearly gates and there is a big line today waiting to come in. The first man who walks up is St. Thomas Aquinas, great Roman Catholic theologian several hundred years before the time of Luther. St. Thomas Aquinas, he comes up and Peter asks the question, "Why should I let you in?" Thomas, he says

the right thing, he says for the sake of Jesus, my savior. St. Peter says, that's a good answer, you can come in, however, I notice you seem to be bringing a whole lot with you. What is that? Thomas goes, this is my bag that I've got. And Peter says, what's in the bag. He says, these are all the good deeds that I have done my whole life and I am so excited to get in there and show Jesus all the good I have done for people to show how much I love him. Peter, he's like, I don't have time for this. There's a whole line that's waiting here. We got a long day ahead of us. Go on in. You're about to find out the truth anyway. Next up steps, Martin Luther. Luther steps up, and Peter asked the question, so why should you get into heaven? And Luther says, for the sake of Christ, my savior. Peter says, that's right. You get to go in. However, I noticed that, that unlike Thomas who came right before you, you aren't carrying anything. Where are your good deeds that you are going to show to Jesus. Martin says, well, I don't know. I left those down on earth for the people who needed them. Peter just smiles, says, go on in.

Here's the thing, just because it's something good we are storing up doesn't mean that we can take it to heaven and it doesn't mean that it's going to get us in to heaven. We can't give up all our possessions and stockpile good deeds, right and left, serving the poor and the hungry and doing everything great and then hope that that's going to somehow earn us favor with God or get us into heaven. That's not the purpose of our good deeds anyway. The good that we do in Jesus' name, and indeed we must do good in Jesus' name, is for the benefit of our neighbor. Not for us to earn a gold star, to get us into heaven.

If anything that just demeans our neighbor even more, because they're just a tool to make us look good. Which leads us to this next point that I want to make this morning. That we would store up treasures in heaven. Just look here at the instructions for the rich. I would say most of us in here, comparatively speaking, are rich. We may not feel it. We may be in debt up to our eyes and making less than everyone around us, but most of us have a roof currently over our heads, maybe drove here in a car, possibly have a cell phone and probably have some sort of food to eat throughout the week. In most of our world's history that makes us rich. Indeed, most of the rest of the world that makes us rich.

Here's what the Bible's instructions for the rich are. These are not my own recommendations. These are straight from our reading. It says, do not be haughty. Do not set hopes on uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. Then it continues. Do good, be rich in good works, be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasures for themselves as a good foundation for the future. Well, that sure sounds like your good works are your treasure in heaven, right? Not so fast. I think what St Paul's getting at here is that to be on guard against the love of money, we should be generous with our money and good works and in doing so, it actually gains us the true treasure here on earth.

It gains us godliness, which is a foundation for the future. It's not the future itself. It is a foundation for the future. Being generous and compassionate, practicing love, and good works takes us from our connection to our own riches and brings godliness, which is a reliance on God

and in letting go, that second half of that sentence in verse 19, and letting go of our riches, we can take hold of life, which is Christ.

Christ is life. We can't hold on to money and hold on to Christ. Being generous in doing good works we're building and strengthening our faith here on earth, our trust and our reliance on God. These are faith building practices. If there is one thing that we take with us into death, it's our faith in Jesus. It's the one thing that gets us into eternity. So it should be the one thing that we cling to here in this life, our faith in Christ and not anything of this world. It is our faith in Christ that pushes us outward to serve our neighbor generously with open arms. Everything else that we cling to instead of Christ in this life is temporary. It is fleeting. It is just a tiny blip on the grand canvas that is eternity.

How do we store up treasures in heaven? This is our last point this morning. This is really what I just got through saying. We store up treasures in heaven by clinging in faith to Christ, trusting in him. We confess our faith with our mouths, we believe in our hearts and we live out our faith with our hands and our feet. That part about confessing our faith with our mouths. St. Paul makes our interesting connection in a reference to Jesus' own confess. Jesus was examined by Pontius Pilot. He was the Roman governor of Judea and by the ruling Jewish council. It was the Jews who charged him with blasphemy to be executed and Pontius Pilot that carried out the Roman execution death sentence. Either side could have acquitted him, but they didn't. Both sides implicit in the death of Jesus. When questioned by Pilot, Jesus just simply spoke the truth of who he was, that he was indeed the king, though his kingdom was not of this world and that in living, he was a living testimony to the truth, because he is truth.

In the end, Jesus was crucified because of who he said he was. He said he was the son of God, the king, the savior and the actions that he did backed it up. He was crucified because of this because he was the Messiah sent to save the world. His confession was true. We are called to make the same confession of truth in faith. We confess the truth that we believe in Jesus Christ that we trust in him for forgiveness of sins as savior of the world. That confession of faith is a lifelong fight.

The translation that we had in our reading this morning, and probably in most of your Bibles is, fight the good fight of faith. That gives me images of war, I was really into war books and stuff growing up, or maybe like a boxing ring, you know, two kids fighting it out, but what's more intended with those words, and the word that they're translated from, is that of a athletic match. So rather than fight, it's more of a contending. So in their context, it would've been like a Greek athletic event. It's saying we should strive in the arena that is this life for faith. Nurture it. Train it. Strengthen it through prayer. Through reading the word. Through gathering together in worship, which you're doing right now. Through receiving the body of blood of Christ, our Lord, which we'll do in just a few moments.

The thing about Greek athletic competitions and the contending that was done is that the winners were given a prize, but the winners never took hold of the prize themselves. It was always placed on them. I suppose you could take your laurel crown and just like toss it off your head after you receive it. But why on earth would you want to do that? This summer when you watch the modern Olympic games, they place the medal around your neck. They don't put it on themselves. It's placed around them. You have been given eternal life. It's been placed on you by Christ himself. His whole life was a life of faithfulness. His death was the ultimate act of faith and trust. The Father received that sacrifice and raised him from the dead and placed him over all things. That same faith that Jesus had is given to you by the Holy Spirit. That faithfulness that is Christ's faithfulness is now your faithfulness. That faithfulness wins you the victory. That faithfulness gets you the crown. That faithfulness clings to Jesus and his promises. We cannot cling to money and still cling to Christ. That faithfulness clings to Christ and in doing so it generously serves the neighbor. That is what's before you today.

You cannot take it with you. You will never see a U-Haul following a hearse. Nothing we have in this life can we take with us, only our faith in Jesus, which grants us eternal life and gives us the treasure of heaven. This is given to you purely out of divine grace and mercy. It is a gift. It is not your own doing. So let go of what you have and cling to what God has given you in Christ, Jesus. Everything else you can't take with you. Cling to Jesus.

In his name, Amen. May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ, Jesus, our Lord. Amen.