

1 Timothy 6:6-16 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. ⁸ And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. ¹¹ But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴ that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, ¹⁵ which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.

Growing up, I loved to read books from a series called “choose your own adventure books.” If you never saw one of these books, let me give you the basic idea. In these books, you, the reader, were always the main character in the story. As you read through the book, at certain points you were give a choice of what to do. Depending on what choice you made, you were told to continue to a specific page number to continue with the adventure you had chosen. Sometimes you would turn and find that you had made a great decision and the story continued. But other times you turned to the indicated page only to find out that your choice meant destruction and that your story was over.

Perhaps Paul’s letter to Timothy read to him much like one of these books. For in this letter, Paul reminds Timothy of his background and then in our verse for the day sets up two options that he can take. He calls for him to choose his own adventure. He can pursue riches or righteousness. Perhaps if Paul had truly written the letter in this format, it would have sounded something like this.

You grow up in a home with a very devout Jewish mother and grandmother who teach you the faith. When you are older you meet a man named Paul who proclaims that the man named Jesus is the long awaited Messiah. You believe and are baptized, thus confessing that Jesus is Lord. You then became a partner in the ministry with Paul. You are ordained and travel around spreading the gospel. Eventually Paul leaves you

behind in Ephesus to shepherd those people. While you are there, you notice how the society is filled with a love of things. And no doubt, this obsession with riches is tempting. What do you do? If you choose to pursue riches, turn to page 166. If you wish to pursue righteousness, turn to page 177.

Page 166 begins, “You fall into a pit of destruction filled with foolish and hurtful lusts. You are plunged underneath pure destruction. You fall away from the faith and pierce yourself through with many sorrows. Your story is over.”

Page 177 begins, “You fight the good fight of faith. Your life is filled with righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and gentleness by the power of the Spirit. You are content with what God have given. You lay hold of eternal life and live forever with the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, to whom be all honor and all power. Your story is not over but will last forever.”

In those “choose your own adventure books,” the real drama was that you never real knew what would happen if you made one choice or another. But thanks to God’s Word delivered to him in the letter Paul wrote, Timothy did not have to guess what might happen with either choice. He was told what would happen. The love of money was the root of all evil and would lead to destruction of faith and life. The love of godliness would lead to eternal life. The question for Timothy was simply whether to believe that word and pursue righteousness or disbelieve that word and give pursuing riches a try.

We too know that as we face our lives each day as baptized Christians, we too have a choice to make as far as our priorities. We too must choose what things we will pursue. And just like Timothy, God tells us today the results of both paths. He tells us that the love of money, the gathering of stuff, the dive into materialism is both wrong and dangerous. Not only can it cause us to fall into all sorts of trouble, it can lead us away from the faith completely. On the other hand, He tells us that the pursuit of righteousness through hearing God’s Word and receiving His Supper is the very way in which we take hold of the eternal life He gives.

I suppose for Timothy and for us, the choice really comes down to faith. Do we believe God’s Word? Do we really think that chasing after wealth is as bad as God makes it out to be? Do we really believe we could lose our faith over it? After all, our world tells us that the pursuit of riches is the heart of what being an American is all about. Die with more money and more stuff than your parents had and you are a success in life.

Do we listen to our world or do we instead believe God's Word? Do we believe that if we are just content with having the essentials of life, our lives will be filled with the abundance of God's blessing? Do we believe that we can be truly content with just the essentials of life and not long after the luxuries of life? And lastly, do we really believe that we need to pursue the gifts of the Spirit in our lives in order to receive them?

That really is the question today? Do we believe God's Word about what we should spend our lives pursuing? Or rather, do we wish to turn to page 166 just to see what really will happen? Perhaps the pursuit of richness will lead to happiness like our world says. Or is the trouble the other way. Are we afraid that if we turn to page 177 we might not find what God promises? Are we afraid that as we pursue righteousness, we will end up broke financially?

Eve way back in the garden had a similar choice. God had told her that eating fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would bring humanity death. He had shown her that living according to His commands was quite wonderful indeed. But Satan tempted her to question God's Word. "Perhaps eating of that fruit will give you wisdom that God is keeping from you," he baited. Eve turned to page 166 and because she did the rest of the human race has found out that God's Word is accurate. For each of us now, our story ends in physical death just as God promised.

The question for us today is if we will believe God's word and will act accordingly. Will we give up pursuing riches trusting God to provide all that we need? Will we focus our time and efforts on pursuing righteousness and faithfully await God's blessings. For Jesus has said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and all these things will be added unto you."

Do you find in your life that you able to make extra time to make an extra buck or two, but yet cannot find time for bible study? Are you so tired from pursuing wealth and enjoying that wealth that you don't have the energy to read the scriptures daily or have devotions with your family? Does a new this or that seem much more exciting and rewarding than something as simple as time with God in His Word or in prayer?

Here at church each week only about 20 different people at the most gather for bible study each week. If you are not one of them, why not? Also, studies tell us that hardly anyone reads the Word each day in their homes anymore. If you don't, why not? And even for those who do read the Word daily and come to Bible

classes, is pursuing God's gifts you favorite use of your time or something you simply feel you have to do? If it is not your favorite thing, why not?

Are you and I too busy pursuing other things? Are we too busy trying to gain the world, and all along losing our souls?

In our modern world, each person is encouraged to plan long range when it comes to finances. An analyst might ask you where you want to be financially in five years, ten years, or when you retire. And according to that answer, that analyst would encourage you to invest so much in different places. Today, I ask you and I ask myself, where do you want to be spiritually in five years, ten years, or when you retire? How much of your time and effort are you willing to invest in pursuing those goals?

Each of us must admit that at least at times, the advertisements on television become the desires of our mind much quicker than the wisdom of the scripture. We must admit that at times the shine on a new product catches our attention even more than a cane to coming to the Lord' Supper. We must admit that at times the thought of winning the lottery excites us much more that the thought of receiving God's riches eternally.

And for those times when we have reached with all our might for the riches of this world, we go before our Lord and admit our page 166 decisions. We must admit that our striving after riches just show our disbelief in His Word and His promises. And as we cry out to God from the pit of destruction we have cast ourselves into, God lifts us up by his grace out of the pit that we have chosen by our actions. He takes our hands in his and lifts us up out of that pit. He tells us that He will not allow our bad sinful decisions be the end of our story. He forgives us for the sake of the cross. He places us back on page 177 where we get to freely enjoy His blessing and favor forever. And being there on page 177, we are free to live out the life that pursues God's gifts with great fervor. And as we pursue righteousness in His Word and His Supper, we will know that God's Word is truth as we see the great gain that comes from being godly and content with what we have received. We will learn that to be content with what God gives is so easy because He is so generous. Amen.