

### “Be Content, People of God”

King Midas of Greek mythology was given the opportunity to ask for anything he wanted, and it would be granted to him. Do you recall what he decided? King Midas asked for and received the ability to turn anything he touched into gold. He would be rich. He would never need anything else again ever in his life. Instead, he would just touch the ordinary, everyday objects that surrounded him, and he would have an endless supply of riches.

But the myth of King Midas isn't all happy, is it? There are at least a few versions of the story today that you might run across today, but they all have one thing in common: turning items to gold by touch has certain unintended consequences. Taking his daughter by the hand, according to some, King Midas found her to be resistant, until he turned and saw that she had been turned to gold. By other accounts, even the food that he needed to eat turned to gold for the king, and he starved. What he thought would bring him the greatest wealth actually took away from him the most important and valuable aspects of King Midas' life.

The story of King Midas recognizes a truth about our human condition. It tells us that greed is dangerous. It can take our eyes off of those things that are truly important. It would have us focus on wealth, which has a certain limited value. Our sermon text today addresses a similar issue. It warns us against greed, and it reminds us of those things that are most valuable for us. But since it is God's Word and not a human story, it touches on even deeper truths that affect not only our physical and earthly life, but also affect our eternal future.

This section of Scripture comes from a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a younger Pastor, Timothy. He offers instructions to Timothy about carrying out his ministry, and these instructions have broad application to other Christians as well. In the verses leading up to our sermon text, Paul had warned Timothy about false teachers and false teaching. He also noted that many false teachers were motivated by financial gain. They had a look of godliness, but the only goal was to make themselves richer.

Into that context, then, Paul instructs Timothy to guard against greed. Greed can and has caused many to fall away from faith. A desire for riches has caused some to **“pierce themselves with many griefs.”** Really these words understate the damage that greed can cause. Those who have wandered from the faith have wandered away from eternal life. They have given up the eternal joys of heaven for the endless suffering of hell. A desire to get rich is a temptation. It's a trap. It results in ruin and destruction.

God would have us guard ourselves against greed as well. Instead, **“godliness with contentment is great gain.”** God invites us to view worldly wealth in its proper perspective. Yes, it can serve good purposes. Yes, God does bless some with great wealth. But wealth doesn't really last, and we only truly need less than we often admit. Paul makes both of those points when he reminds us, **“For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.”**

See, we tend to look well beyond the necessities of life. We get jealous of what others have or we imagine how much better our lives would be if we only had more. And we often forget the lesson that many of us learned early in life: the difference between needs and wants. The things we truly need are nourishment and shelter. The Greek word translated “clothing” in our text is actually “covering,” which could refer to clothing and to shelter, and we need both. But beyond that, we don't really need anything. We don't need a fancy house or a shiny car, an iPhone or an i-anything else. We need clothing, but we don't need fancy silk suits and designer dresses. We need food, but we don't need extravagant steak dinners.

And yet it is so easy for any of us to get caught up in these things. We listen to the voice of our sinful nature saying, “You deserve it! Why should everyone else have those things when you don’t?”

But godliness with contentment says that I already have what is most valuable. In other words, what I truly need is what I should really want. What I truly need is what lasts beyond this life and into eternity. It is my relationship with a loving God. It’s the forgiveness of sins through the perfect life and innocent sacrifice of Jesus my Savior. It’s having God declare that through faith he has made me not guilty of any sin, forgiven of my natural inclination to greed, and fit for eternal life in heaven with him. All of these other earthly pleasures take my focus off of where it belongs, on Jesus. With the wisdom of God the writer of Proverbs recognized the same concern and prayed, **“give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’”** (Proverbs 30:8-9). That is the sort of attitude characterized by godliness with contentment. That’s the attitude God would have us cultivate as he warns us to guard against greed. Instead, be content, people of God.

Be content as you fight the good fight of faith. After warning about the perils of greed, Paul instructs, **“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.”** These are the positive counterparts to the dangers of greed. Chase after the constructive and the edifying. Pursue living a Christian life rather than entertaining the temptations of greed and covetousness.

While Paul’s encouragement applies in a particular and specific way to Timothy, a “man of God” as a pastor, it is worthwhile encouragement for all of God’s people, all believers. The life of a Christian is one of fleeing from temptation and instead pursuing righteousness and all that accompanies it.

Paul reminds Timothy of his baptism in connection with this fight of faith. He writes: **“Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”** At his baptism, God called Timothy to eternal life. He also moved Timothy to make a bold confession of his faith. Paul’s encouragement is that what Timothy has said about his faith should be constantly backed up by the life that he lives.

In your own baptism, God called you to faith and to eternal life. Fighting the good fight of the faith means holding onto that gift and repenting of the times that your life has not matched up with your faith. Many of us, baptized as infants, later on also made a public confession of our faith. At our confirmations we promised that with God’s help we would hold firmly to his Word and would pattern our lives according to that Word.

To assist Timothy and us in living our lives according to our confession, Paul points us to Jesus. Jesus too made a public confession as he was on trial before Pontius Pilate. He boldly proclaimed the truth that he is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. It was that very confession that led to his death on the cross, the death that took away all our sins.

And trusting in his death for us, we await his return. Paul reminds Timothy that God in his own time will bring about the end of the world, when Jesus Christ will return as judge. Keeping that blessed event always in our minds is further encouragement as we fight the good fight of our faith.

At this mention of Jesus Christ and his work, Paul launches into a beautiful doxology, a poem of praise. What an appropriate reaction to everything that God has done for us in Christ and everything that he has promised for us! Paul refers to God as **“the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.”**

And with this word of praise Paul again reminds us to keep everything in perspective. When he tells us to be content, that isn’t something that we do on our own. We guard against greed and fight the good fight of faith through the power of God that works in us. He strengthens us to serve him, and not money. He keeps us firm in our faith and active in our service. To him be honor and might forever.

The Text: 1 Timothy 6:6–16 (NIV84)

<sup>6</sup> But godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. <sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. <sup>9</sup> People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

<sup>11</sup> But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. <sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup> In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you <sup>14</sup> to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup> which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.