

1 Timothy 6:6-10,17-19 (Luke 12:13-21) – Consumer Detox wk2 ‘Rich’ (16th March 2014)

INTRO EXERCISE: Discuss these two questions...

How much money do you need to be happy?

- Enough to buy food and clothes with no savings
- Enough to have some savings as well
- Enough to have savings and to own your own home
- Enough to have savings, your own home and a holiday each year
- Enough to have savings, your own home, an annual holiday and regular meals out

If your house was on fire, and you could only take one thing with you, which would it be?

- Your photo albums
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- Your bible
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Challenge of ‘right’ answer – maybe different to the one you would give at home! Thorny issue of wealth, and more specifically priority and purpose of wealth in our lives. *What is a good attitude to money?*

Quick overview of biblical attitude to money (indebted to Richard Foster):

Holding two contrasting views of money: dark side and light side. Dark side: Q Foster p21; Light side: Q Foster p22-23.

How reconcile? Key is understand that money is not neutral, it is not just stuff. Money is a ‘power’ Teaching of Paul: principalities and powers – stuff that was made good but corrupted by Fall and has a power of its own. Includes governments and leadership systems. Also money. When Jesus refers to Mammon he is giving money a personal and spiritual character. It desires to dominate us, and therefore vies for our worship alongside God.

This is what explains why money has such contrasting teaching in the bible. The dark side relates to when money has a grip on our lives, when it is in danger of replacing God. Hence the stern warnings. But when money is in its proper place, received and valued as a gift of God to be used for his glory – but in no danger of supplanting him – then it can be used as a blessing and a source of joy.

So how do we have a good attitude to money? Lots of answers, but will be guided by main passage we’ve been given for today: 1 Timothy 6:6-10,17-19. Right perspective, right hope and right ambition.

Perspective: perspective is vital isn't it? Literally means 'looking through' i.e. it's the lens through which you view life. Studied Renaissance Art and development of perspective in paintings crucial: mediaeval paintings were flat, and then suddenly painters worked out how to use perspective and suddenly landscapes stretched out behind. Whole new world. 20th century MC Escher shows what happens when you play about with perspective: all looks wrong.

So what's perspective on money? READ v7. 'You can't take it with you when you go.' Why matter? Money is temporary. It serves a purpose for our lifetime, but it is only temporary. God is eternal, heaven is eternal. Money isn't. Finds of Saxon coins: whoever once owned them fabulously wealthy. But disappear into soil and lost.

True perspective on money recognises its temporary nature. You cannot have an eternal relationship with it. So why live as if money is the ultimate arbiter of your life?

2nd: **right hope** – READ v17. Again, direct contrast between money and God (picking up Jesus' teaching. For those who dispute it – one of those places where clear that Paul knows it very well!)

Why should we hope in God and not money? Note Paul's reasons for each. Money is 'uncertain'. Development of v7 – not only can you not take it with you when you go, but also you might not keep it when you're here. Personally learnt that lesson with Halifax shares – end of 2007 got into tracking them. £11/share. Mid 2008 £8 – chose not to sell (greed – might go up again) then plummeted, worth nothing. Only a couple of thousand in shares, but makes point. Money is not guaranteed. Fortunes change – sure most of you know something about that.

What about God? Lot about God that Paul doesn't need to say, but says elsewhere: loves us, cares for us, meets our needs: here, develops that idea – READ v17b. *Note positive language Paul uses: not 'gives us just about enough to scrape by' but 'richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.'* Note how he uses 3 words where he could have said something more mealy-mouthed. 'Richly' provides: element of abundance, lavishness. Not suggesting prosperity gospel, but God doesn't scrimp. He has unlimited resources. 'Everything' – again not just in certain areas, God looks after the whole of our lives. 'Enjoyment' – surprised by that? He wants us to enjoy his blessings. He wants us to have happy, fulfilled lives. Again, not necessarily wealthy lives in monetary terms, money sits in its proper place below him: but full, complete lives. God is not a miser.

So, right perspective and right hope will get us a long way. God can meet our needs without money exercising its grip of fear and jealousy and insecurity upon us. But there's one more thing we can take away from this passage: we need to retain a **right ambition** where it comes to money. Paul gives us some advice depending on our circumstances.

First, he writes to those who aren't wealthy yet. READ v9-10. One of famous verses of bible: note not 'all evil' but 'all kinds of evil'. Misapplied sometimes. But point is clear: ambition to be wealthy is dangerous, especially to Christians. Look at language: temptation, harmful desires, ruin and destruction, ultimately grief. Note: not done to you, you 'pierce yourself'.

One of those verses which strikes us as intuitively true. Yet we do long for more money, don't we? Not that being rich is bad in itself, it's just we have to watch ourselves. What's motivating our life choices? Should I take a job with more money if the longer hours or longer commute will harm my family life or my capacity to serve at church? Should I invest in that risky scheme or speculative property purchase which might make me lots of money but might ruin me? Applies more widely: should I cut pressure my suppliers at work to improve my profit margins if it means one of my suppliers isn't paid fairly and suffers financially?

Having accumulation of money as final arbiter is destructive. Two great developments in our society: widespread flight from God, and what I have talked about previously as the dominance of the economic vision of society. Suggest two are not unconnected. Money is a power: the more we worship it, the more it will replace God, and not just God, but God's perspective on our society and what it means to flourish as a human being. (Aside: who will you vote for next year? All studies show that most people ultimately vote for the party which think will benefit them most financially. In doing so we relegate solving all kinds of great social evils – destruction of our environment, inequality between rich and poor – to second in pecking order. Difficult choice this time, not suggesting any of them look like appealing choices, but might want to ask ourselves the question: what priorities should govern our choice of government?) So Paul's advice: beware being driven my accumulation of wealth as your primary goal.

But different advice to those who are already rich: READ v18. Note: not just money. 'Do good.' God needs more than your money, he wants your lives as much as anyone else's. But alongside that, he also commands generosity. Why? *Giving breaks stranglehold of money.* We release it to God to bless others. Nothing cures our love of money better than generous giving. You want to be free in this area: go and give a chunk of money away. If there's a link: more you give, the more free you'll be. (True in my own life.)

Unfortunate that advertising our gift day for heating repair this week – wasn't planned like that. Last thing I'd want to do is reduce the whole landscape of worthy causes to this one issue. So please don't assume that's all I want to address. All I would encourage you to do is to apply generosity wherever you feel called to do it. But it's worth saying that I think most of us sit in this category. Might not feel rich, but if richest person in world is 1 and poorest is 100, then the average Brit is 8. So by comparison, we have vast capacity to do good with our money compared with 90% of the world.

Two final thoughts as I close, which frame the beginning and the end of this passage. Why does this stuff matter? Who benefits? Well, of course we can say 'others' who might receive our generosity. Or we can say God, whose kingdom is built. But Paul reminds us this is for our good. READ v6 – the goal is contentment. Contentment is rare in this world, and truthfully most people aren't. Our society is built on discontent (advertising creates it) – a truly contented person is like a magnet that people cluster around. Who wouldn't like to be more contented?

And look where he finishes: READ v19b. This is about real life. Zoe life (not bios). We choose God over money to experience life in all its fullness, in this world & next. You want to be really rich in all that matters? Choose life, choose freedom. Choose the right perspective, hope, ambition. Real life does not consist in the abundance of our possessions. (PRAY)

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