

Many people think the Bible says, "Money is the root of all evil." But that's a misquote.

In our Epistle lesson today, we heard the real version. Paul says, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."

That's an important distinction. "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil."

Not money is the root. The love of money is a root.

And not "all evil." Money or even the love of money is not the root of everything evil. Instead, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." There are all kinds of bad thing, all sorts of difficulties that can arise from loving money.

The full quote is,
"The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains."¹

In other words, loving money can get you into trouble, spiritual and otherwise.

There's nothing inherently wrong with money. But if we elevate money in our own personal pecking order, if we view it too highly it becomes spiritually dangerous. It can even become idolatrous.

Money is a wonderful servant but a horrible master. If money becomes the master, if making money becomes our ultimate goal, then we will leave casualties in our wake. We'll place making money as more important than family, friends, relationships. And we all know people who have sacrificed their relationships in order to increase their wealth.

Some choose to love people and use things.

Some choose to use people and love things.

Now money is a wonderful tool. It is useful in many ways, especially in a market economy. It's a wonderful medium of exchange, trading our time and effort for the time and effort of others. Money is a wonderful tool, but it is never the ultimate fix.

We often do try to throw money at problems. There is a natural temptation to seek out security, financial security. But how much money does it take to make us totally secure?

How much money does it take to make you disaster proof? You might have insurance to help you pick up the pieces after a disaster. But money can't stop a disaster.

¹ 1Tim 6:10

Or how much money does it take to keep you safe from terror, or violence? How much does it cost to make you disease proof? How big a balance do you need to make you death proof?

Of course, no amount of money can bring us this kind of security. If we go down that road, we'll find there's never enough. Jesus even tells a story about this. He says,

"A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, 'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.' Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"'

"But God said to him, 'You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?'

(Jesus concludes,) "Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God."²

Note: Jesus is NOT saying it's foolish to save. But he is telling us it is foolish to look for your security primarily from your portfolio while ignoring your relationship with God.

The rich landowner in the parable thought he had it made. But he forgot the fact that his riches didn't make him death proof.

As Paul says in our Epistle lesson, "We brought nothing into the world, (and) we can take nothing out of it."³

You can't take it with you. We know that. You never see a hearse pulling a U-Haul. And all the money in the world will not prevent us from dying. The mortality rate on this planet is still right up there at 100%.

So, if we love money above all else, if we place it before people and before relationships, if we place amassing wealth ahead of our relationship with God, then we are in spiritual trouble. That's what Paul is warning us about.

Now, does Paul think there are appropriate ways to use money? You bet. After all, Paul was trained as a tentmaker by profession. And Paul would use those skills to make a living at times. He also had wealthy folks who supported and underwrote his ministry. There were not a ton of rich folks in the early church, but there were some. And they often bankrolled Paul and his missionary organization.⁴

So Paul is not anti-money. But he is against loving money. So Paul does tell us about appropriate ways to use our wealth. He talks about them at the end of our Epistle today.

He begins,

"As for those who in the present age are rich..."

² Luke 12:16-21 NLT

³ 1Tim 16:7

⁴ See a few of these folks mentioned in Rom 16:1-2, 1Cor 16:15-19, 2Tim 4:19

And folks, since the world's median annual household income is somewhere in the neighborhood of \$10,000, Paul is talking about us. If you're pulling in more than \$10,000 a year, you're rich.

Even folks at the poverty line in the United States are amongst the world's rich. \$25,000 is the poverty line for a family of 4. From the world's standpoint, that's rich. And if you're a middle-class American, you are amongst the super-wealthy of the world.

We don't think about it this way. We may not be featured on "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." But as far as most of the world is concerned, if you want to see the lifestyles of the rich, look inside your own front door.

So Paul is talking to us:

"As for those who in the present age are rich command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."⁵

Don't put your hope in your money, the "uncertainty of riches." Just because you're rich in "the present age," don't think that's going to necessarily last forever. You can't take it with you. And you never know. From time to time there will be financial downturns and setbacks. You may not even be able to keep your portfolio intact.

So, instead of placing your hope on the uncertainty of riches, Paul is telling us to set our hope on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. God must always be our ultimate hope, and the place where we place our ultimate trust.

Then Paul continues:

"They (the rich) are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life."⁶

The life that really is life. What is that? Let me get at that by telling you about someone I knew

As a young priest, my second funeral was for Roy, a member of Grace Episcopal Church, in Vernon. Roy was a Texas boy who became a pilot in WWII, flying cargo from India to China over "the hump."

After the war, Roy and a partner bought a surplus DC-3 and flew it to Australia. They started hauling freight, and then passengers. Their business grew rapidly, and they relocated to Hong Kong, and added planes and flights to Sydney, Shanghai, Manila, Singapore, and Bangkok.

⁵ 1Tim 6:17

⁶ 1Tim 6:18

After 2 years, the airline was becoming so successful that the British government in Hong Kong was worried about an American owning half of such a strategically important business in their back yard. So they forced Roy to sell his share of the airline to a British national.

The name of that airline was Cathay Pacific, which is now the 14th largest passenger airline and the 5th largest freight airline in the world.

Early in my ministry, I spent a lot of time with Roy as he was battling cancer. I once asked Roy if he was resentful about being forced to sell his airline, his 'baby,' and then have it become so successful. And he said,

"No, I'm just glad I had a small part in getting her off to a good start."

Roy returned to Texas and went into the oil business. At times he was rich. At other times he was flat broke. That's the way the oil business sometimes works. But everyone who knew Roy said that it didn't matter whether Roy had millions or nothing. He was the same decent Christian man, regardless of how much money was in his bank account. And people said, when he did have money, that he was always generous in sharing it with others.

Roy had an exciting and fascinating life, a life packed with experiences. Pilot; war hero; aviation pioneer; oilman. But there's something else I should tell you about Roy. One day I asked him,

"Roy, looking back on your life, what's the best thing that ever happened to you?"

I thought I already knew the answer. I thought Roy was going to tell me that it was his family. He and I spent a lot of time talking about his kids and grandkids, and how proud he was of them. But Roy gave me a different answer. He said,

"The best thing that ever happened to me was the day I turned my life over to Jesus Christ."

The most important and significant thing in Roy's life was his relationship with God. Roy had his priorities straight. God came first, and everything else came second.

Roy could have been incredibly successful in the airline business. Roy could have been resentful for having to give it up. Instead, Roy was thankful that he was a child of God, and a follower of Jesus Christ. Roy's example is a good one for all of us.

As middle-class Americans, we have been blessed with incredible wealth and riches. But with that material success comes great responsibilities.

As our patron saint, St. Paul tells us, we are "to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share."

That's the way, he says, that we may "take hold of the life that really is life."