

A Great Gain.

Text: 1 Timothy 6:6-12

Suggested Hymns:

152, 303, 352, 320, 163

1) The nature of this gain

2) Obstacles in obtaining this gain

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Timothy 6:6-12 ⁶ *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. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

One of the wisest prayers ever uttered is that of Agur, the son of Jakeh. This prayer is written in Proverbs 30:7-9, ⁷ *Two things I request of You (Deprive me not before I die): ⁸ Remove falsehood and lies far from me; Give me neither poverty nor riches -- Feed me with the food allotted to me; ⁹ Lest I be full and deny You, And say, "Who is the Lord?" Or lest I be poor and steal, And profane the name of my God.*

What he asked of the Lord was all that he needed for his body and life which was *sufficient for the day*¹. The reason he asks for neither too little nor too much shows that he was interested in the well-being of his soul.

On the one hand, poverty might cause him to steal and therefore bring him under the curse of the Law. On the other hand, too much might cause him to become proud, and to deny, that what he has, comes from the Lord. This happened to Nebuchadnezzar, who ascribed all his riches and success to himself. He said, *Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?*² Thus it became necessary for the Lord to humble him and to reduce him to the level of the beast. However when his reason was restored he confessed, ³⁷ *Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.* (Dan. 4:37).

All that Agur asked in his prayer may be summed up in the word “*contentment.*” That is the prominent word in the text before us. Having the proper kind of contentment, is a great gain and produces happy people. Our text says, *Godliness with contentment is great gain.* With the help of the Holy Spirit let us study the nature of this gain and how to overcome obstacles in obtaining this gain.

1. The Nature of This Gain

GODLINESS *with contentment is great gain.* Timothy, to whom these words were first addressed, had to contend with people in his day who had a wrong view of what godliness really is. In verse 5 we read that they supposed *that godliness is a means of gain.* Evidently they supposed that if they were rich, then they were acceptable in the sight of God. It often happens that people of wealth consider themselves above the Law of God and of man.

We have seen examples of this recently in the news. Rich or famous people who “*drink and drive*” and get caught because they are well over the limit are often let off by the judges without any penalty. People can see this is wrong and protest. Often wealthy people feel that because of their wealth and power they may do just as they please. In this way they are also declaring themselves independent of God.

However, in Timothy’s day there was another problem. Some people who desired to teach Christianity only wanted to do it for their personal gain. To them the teaching of religion was a question of “*What is in it for me?*”

St. Paul turns the matter around and says that *godliness is great gain*, not a source of income, but a blessing that reaches far beyond the worldly things of this life. Godliness is reverence, respect and piety toward God. It means living and acting as God would have us live and behave. To show the nature of godliness, the apostle urges Timothy to follow a different course and to seek certain virtues. These are listed in verse 11. They are *righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and gentleness*. These are the attributes which constitute true godliness.

In acquiring these attributes the first requisite is **FAITH**. We read in Hebrews 11:6 that *without faith it is impossible to please God*. Without faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners, who gave Himself into death in payment of our sins and who rose again from the dead to assure us that His work was sufficient to reconcile us to God — without such faith there is no possibility of godliness.

Faith in Christ makes us the children of God; it makes us acceptable to Him. Without faith we are *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise*.³ But when the Holy Spirit has come into our hearts, then we are *no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God* as we read in Eph. 2:19.

The next attribute is **RIGHTEOUSNESS**. Having been brought to faith, having been saved solely by the grace of God in Christ Jesus and having been made children and heirs of God, we must then proceed to live as the children of God. We must follow after righteousness.

To live righteously, we must flee everything that dishonours God and live according to His Will. Our life must be one of integrity, uprightness, honesty, and a life free from vanity and lies. While we are no longer under the Law, and while we cannot be saved by doing the deeds of the Law, to the child of God the Law of God is the rule by which he orders his life. The 10 Commandments are for our good and shows us the Will of God and how we are to conduct ourselves. The Christian does the deeds of the Law, not to be saved by them; but rather, because he is saved, he seeks to show his gratitude to God by living his life to Him. This is the righteousness that we must seek diligently and it applies not only to our deeds but also to our words and to our thinking and feeling.

Next, we are to **LOVE**. Love to God and to our fellow men is the expression of our faith. We read in Galatians 5:6 that *faith works through love*. Love expresses itself in the proper attitude toward God. It expresses itself in reverence for God, in respect for His Will, it relies on His promises, and in giving Him the worship, prayer and praise that is His due. Love also manifests itself in a proper relation to our fellow men. Our Saviour shows what our love to our fellow men is to be when He says, *Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them*⁴.

Love expresses itself particularly in the other virtues named here, namely **PATIENCE** and Gentleness. How often we become impatient with the dealings of God, thinking that we could manage our lives so much better. How often we lose patience with our fellow men, all because they do not conform to our way of thinking. Patience here means steadfastness, faithfulness and endurance. The devil surrounds us with many snares and many temptations, but the child of God must go resolutely on and walk as God wants him to go. He must hold to his faith and not be swerved from it, no matter how great his trials are.

GENTLENESS or meekness are often portrayed as weakness. Other words that describe these attributes are, being mild, courteous, kind, merciful, submissive and compassionate. People often make light of the Saviour's words in Matthew 5:5, ⁵ *Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth*. They consider meekness to be a lack of character and a lack of strength.

However, the opposite is true. It requires real strength of character to be meek in many situations of life. People want to be masterful, strong, self-asserting, and yet, that is often the result of false pride. Meekness does not mean that we are to avoid taking a stand for the truth or that we should not defend it to the last ditch. It does mean, however, that we should not be easily provoked, and that we should be patient when we are hurt and that we should be forgiving. That is what godliness is.

There is another word in the text that we must observe carefully, and that is **contentment**. An appropriate motto reads:

The beauty of the house is order;

*The blessing of the house is **contentment***

The glory of the house is hospitality

The crown of the house is godliness.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. Contentment represents “a perfect condition of life in which no aid or support is needed, a sufficiency of the necessities of life, and a mind contented with its lot.”⁵ Contentment cannot be achieved without godliness, and godliness may be marred by a lack of contentment. Contentment is possible only when we are certain of God’s love and care. St. Paul knew contentment, for he wrote in Philippians 4:11, **for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content.**

Shakespeare wrote that King Henry VI once said

My crown is in my heart, not on my head

Not deck’d with diamonds and Indian stones;

Nor to be seen: My crown is called content;

A crown it is that seldom kings enjoy.

It is necessary, first of all, to remember that all we are and all we have is of God. **We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.** We came into this world naked. We brought nothing with us. The life we have was formed by God. All that we need for this life is of God. We indeed work for the things needful for this body and life, but it is God who gives us the power to get wealth and the ability to earn a living. Life itself is His gift. When life is over, we cannot take with us any of the possessions that we have acquired in a lifetime. Yet so often we are not content with the things that we actually need and we want more.

Contentment implies being satisfied with the necessities of life. Our text says, **having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.** Do we actually need any more than that? We need food enough to nourish our bodies and to keep them strong and healthy. More than this we do not need.

We need clothing to cover and protect the body, but more than that we do not need. Any surplus we have of food or clothing will not actually benefit us. We can only wear one pair of shoes at a time. We should eat only as much as the body requires. If we are not temperate in the use of food, we are harming

ourselves. Socrates once said, “*Contentment is natural wealth, luxury is artificial poverty.*”

The blessing of contentment is stated in many places in Holy Scripture. One example is in Psalm 37:16, ¹⁶ *A little that a righteous man has Is better than the riches of many wicked.* And another is Proverbs 17:1, ¹ *Better is a dry morsel with quietness, Than a house full of feasting with strife.*

2. Obstacles In Obtaining This Gain

If we lack godliness, we lack contentment. There is a fatalism that says, “*What will be will be.*” A person may solemnly surrender himself to his lot, and a person may show indifference to pleasure or pain, but he derives no happiness from that. This is not the great gain of which our text speaks. With all the show of indifference to his lot, a man may yet be under the influence of those things that work against true happiness and that deprive him of the great gain.

The apostle therefore warns against those things that keep man from achieving this gain. The first warning is against **GREED**. Our text says, *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.* The world seems obsessed with the thought of getting earthly gain. People will go to great lengths to gain wealth. But we read in Isaiah 5: 8, ⁸ *Woe to those who join house to house; They add field to field, Till there is no place Where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land!* There is a warning that reads, “*Wealth is no sin, and poverty is no virtue. But both may be either — it depends on the heart.*”⁶

The danger lies in making the acquisition of riches our aim and our ruling passion. This will then result in temptation. The desire to be rich stirs up evil lusts which will then take possession of a person’s thoughts and actions. They will fall into a trap from which they cannot remove themselves. When they are ensnared, the devil uses them when and how he will, and leads them from one sin to another. They fall into foolish lusts, foolish because there is no reasonable or intelligent explanation for them. These lusts also injure the soul, finally leading to eternal destruction and perdition. Thus by greed people lose their salvation, and they lose the great gain.

The second warning concerns **COVETOUSNESS**. We read in verse 10, ¹⁰ *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.* This verse is often

misquoted to read, “*Money is the root of all evil.*” That is not true. Money is useful for many things as a means of exchange. With it we may buy those things that are needful for the body; with it we may distribute the Scriptures, with it we may carry the Gospel into all the world. However, it is the love of money that is the root of all evil and it is faith-destroying.

Luther says: “*The sordid and niggardly drudgery in which the world now engages for the purpose of augmenting the heap of dollars and cents so as to become rich and honoured, chokes the Word of God in many a heart.*” St. Paul states the same truth in our text, *some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

Some, like Judas Iscariot, have erred from the faith. The love of money caused him to throw overboard all the blessings that were his in his association with the Saviour. It resulted in suicide. Ananias and Sapphira, too, loved money and they let it control them, and the result was lying to the Holy Spirit. Both were struck dead for their sin. These and many others have *pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* Instead of gain they suffered irreparable loss.

The results of letting the love of money take possession of man are so painful, so disastrous, that the apostle gives a very brief but pointed warning against such a besetting sin. ¹¹ *But you, O man of God, flee these things.* Flee the love of money and its associated dangers; flee *useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.*⁷

To overcome these temptations **FIGHTING** is required. Our text says, ² *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.* It will not always be easy to follow this text. It requires concentration, it requires a battle. Such fighting is called for on the part of all those who have come to faith. When a person has come to faith, the devil desires to get him out of it, and he must fight; he must struggle against the difficulties that come to him, against those things that would deprive him of the great gain.

However, in our fight we are not alone. God is with us. We can get much comfort from Isaiah 41:10 ¹⁰ *Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I*

am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

Does it pay to strive to live a godly life in this present world? Is the struggle really worthwhile? Our text says that ***Godliness with contentment is great gain.*** Contentment is ours because God has given it to us through faith in Christ. Contentment is ours because God has called us to eternal life.

May we therefore be content, fight the good fight of faith,. and daily thank God for all the blessings which He has bestowed upon us. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matt. 6:34

² Daniel 4:30

³ Eph. 2:12

⁴ Matt. 7:12

⁵ Strong's, Thayer

⁶ Lenski

⁷ 1 Tim 6:5