

Be Rich in Good Works

1 Timothy 6:17-19 and Psalm 14:1-3

Does anybody here watch home make-overs on television? My favorite is *Fixer Upper* with Joanna and Chip Gaines who are renewing Waco, Texas one home at a time. What about house hunting shows? I find the international house hunts very intriguing, as homes are built so differently around the globe. And then there is the one show called million-dollar listing, which chronicles sales of homes in the expensive neighborhoods of Los Angeles like Bel Air, Beverley Hills and Malibu. Now just in case you are wondering about your pastor's television habits, I actually don't spend a lot of time in front of the TV, but over the last few years, I have watched episodes of these reality TV shows as we call them.

And this past Thursday night, Paul and I just happened to tune into Million Dollar listing. A woman expecting her first child was desperately trying to find a home, although her husband was on business in Korea, which is often the case. The agent was striking out with home selections, as the woman was looking for a home in Bel Air, but had a budget of only 2.8 million. Well, the homes they could find in this price range were only one or two bedrooms and usually placed near something undesirable, like a freeway entrance or had a style that wasn't appealing. The woman found the house she wanted in Bel Air, but the price tag was just over 5 million. Out of her price range! So, finally the agent coaxed her to consider another neighborhood that was more affordable, but only 10 minutes from Bel Air. She found a more affordable house she really liked and her husband agreed sight unseen to offer \$3.1 million dollars, a \$100,000 over asking price as well as \$300,000 over their budget!

I remember thinking who are these people who starting off in life, expecting their first child, can afford a three million-dollar house. Who are those who can afford some of the other listings I have seen which exceed \$10 million or the other reality show I have seen a couple of times where people looking for vacation homes give their relators a price range from 2 to 5 or 5 to 10 million dollars? Who are these people?

"As for those who in the present age are rich," said Apostle Paul to Timothy. When you heard this phrase this morning, you might have decided that this message wasn't for you today. As, I don't believe any of us will be featured as a buyer on the show entitled Million Dollar Listing nor will be featured on international house or vacation home hunters with a skies-the-limit budget.

Yet, what does it mean to be rich? A number of years ago I ran across a website entitled globalrichlist.com. When the website loads, you are asked to choose your country of origin to designate currency and then you enter either your annual income or your accumulated wealth such as equity in your home, your investments, and value of your possessions.

So, I thought I would put *what does it mean to be rich* in perspective for us this morning, as this website takes the information you input and compares it to the other 7.6 billion people on this planet. So, are you ready?

If your annual income is \$10,000 a year, there are only 960 million people richer than you, which means six billion, six hundred forty thousand people have less than you do. Less than 960 million richer and more than **6.6 billion** people have less! Millions to billions. If your annual income is \$20,000 a year, there are only 219 million people richer than you. And if your annual income is \$100,000 a year there are only 5 million people richer than you are.

We could do a similar comparison using accumulated wealth. If you have \$100,000 in wealth (that's everything you own outright) there are only 367 million people richer than you or 7.233 billion who have less than you. If you have \$300,000 in wealth, there are only 175 million people richer than you; and if you have a million dollars in wealth, then there are only 25 million people richer than you are or 7.575 billion people who have less than you.

Why all these numbers? Well, when we assess our status in life as far as wealth, we tend to look up and not look down. We tend to look at those who have more, like the young woman wanting her first home and was able to buy it even though it cost \$3.1 million dollars.

If you make \$100,000 a year than you are in the top 0.08% income earners on this planet. If you have a \$100,000 of wealth you have more wealth than 91.84% of the world's population.

These are sobering statistics for all of us to consider, because I will take a risk and say that these words of Apostle Paul to Timothy apply to all of us when we put our income and wealth in the global perspective. We are rich in light of the vast majority of the 7.6 billion people who live on this planet. Now you may want to push back and say it takes more money to live here than it does other parts of the globe, but in doing so we may very well indict ourselves.

In this letter, Apostle Paul was advising Timothy, for he was pastoring congregations in Ephesus and these congregations included slaves and poor widows, as well as women and men who had considerable financial means and power within the Roman society. Commentator Christian Eberhart reminds us

that, "For the most part, riches could only be acquired in the first century through continuous cooperation with the Roman administration. Those who were rich, usually supported a system, whether they realized it or not, that oppressed the vast majority of the population for the benefit of only a few at the center of the Empire." Yet, scriptures record that some of these wealthy people were also benefactors of early Christianity, supporting Jesus and his disciples. So, we must remember that wealth in and of itself is not evil.

Paul began his letter to Timothy warning him against false teachers who had infiltrated the faith with visions of prosperity, if one is faithful. We know this as the prosperity gospel, which fits nicely into our consumeristic culture of more. The prosperity gospel says that wealth is a sign of God's blessings. The more faithful you are, the better Christian you become, the more God will shower you with financial resources.

So, it is understandable that in Timothy's economically diverse congregations that the wealthy might feel more pious than the poor. Therefore, Paul issues a caution, "Command the rich not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches." Notice that the command is not to get rid of wealth or that wealth is bad or evil. The command is a plea for an attitude check of the wealthy. The command points to the necessity of humility, especially for one who has economic means.

What is necessary for the wealthy according to Apostle Paul? What is necessary is a humble spirit that trusts God, rather than their accumulated riches.

Trust "God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." We have everything we need for our enjoyment and it has nothing to do with the size of our bank accounts. Our stuff is not going to make us happy. More stuff isn't going to make our years ahead better. As a matter of fact, more stuff means that we have more stuff to take care of! Just ask me, as my boxes are still not all unpacked! So, did I really need this stuff in the first place? God richly provides us with everything, and all we need to do is do good with what we have been given.

So, what have you been given? What has God richly provided you with? What have we been richly given as a church?

As a church, we have been richly given a wonderful diversity of members. I just spent time with our Indonesian language speakers on retreat this weekend. What joy there was in the singing and praising of God and what a blessing it was for me to participate such an informal setting! On Friday evening after sharing God's word and then singing and praising God, I turned into bed at 10 p.m., but some stayed to sing God's praises until almost midnight! Wilson and I then spent

time with the young people on Saturday and we had a wonderful conversation about the 10 commandments and what they mean for their lives, a source of inspiration about how to relate to God and to each other, not a set of do's and don'ts. I had the opportunity for conversations one on one as well in small groups. I also received a very precious gift (as one of the congregational members had recently returned from Indonesia), this beautiful bible that has Indonesian and English side by side! I'm excited about being able to learn how to read scripture in Indonesian. God has richly provided for us, yet are we generous and ready to share with each other our time, our passions, our understanding of faith, so that we might build an even stronger foundation for our future as a church? Do we realize that our diversity is for our good pleasure? Do we realize that developing deeper realizations across our diversity will enrich us?

What about you and me as individuals though? What has God richly provided you with? What is God asking you to do? How is God asking you to be generous and ready to share? What good works will you do?

What first came to mind for me, as I asked myself these questions, was this: I have been given the gift of a loving and supportive husband and family. I have been given the gift of this new position as your pastor. I have been given the gift of a beautiful new home here in Redlands. These are just a few of the gifts God has so richly provided for my life.

So, how will I do good in light of these riches I have received from God? The beautiful home Paul and I now have is designed to be a place of hospitality. We plan to be generous and ready to share our home with this church, with those we meet in our community, and with friends who travel to visit. I want to be generous and ready to share of my time, energy and talents with this church and with those I meet in our community, as developing relationships with others will fuel our future as God's church. We are not to be isolated islands, for we are the body of Christ and our web of relationships across all of our diversity will open doors to our future in ways that we can't yet imagine.

Dear Timothy, says Paul, "Fight the good fight of faith." Persevere in being faithful, even in the face of adversity and fools who continually shout out, "There is no God."

Who will we trust, whether we are rich by global standards or really struggling just to get by today? Who or what will we trust?

I pray that we will trust the mystery we call God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment, so that we may do good and be rich in good works, always generous and ready to share.

You see it is not about just believing, it is about what we do in response to what we believe! God's grace has been freely given to us, let us respond gratefully; yes, grace and gratitude go hand in hand. With gratitude, let us be rich in good works! Amen.