

The task of a Bible teacher, is to explain God's Word in a way that helps us to understand it, **and** in a way that helps us to know how it applies to us...

But, the way most people will **judge** a given message is:

a) Did it capture my attention?

Sadly, that often equates with "Was it entertaining and funny?"; or

b) Is it scratching where I itch...

In other words, "I've been thinking about this issue, and it's important to me – Did the message speak into that issue?"

But God's Word, isn't designed to entertain, and nor is it about soothing an agitation I feel.

Hebrews 4:12-13 (ESV)

¹² For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

¹³ And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

That's what the word of God does...

God's Word, isn't about scratching an itch we have –

- God's Word will **make** us itch
- it will make us uncomfortable...
- It will reveal some very uncomfortable truths about ourselves...
- It will upset us.
- And it will not leave us unchanged...

But I'll tell you what: When God's word leads us to repentance and a change in attitude and practice, then the joy of the Lord will overflow.

And the 5 verses we read today, are a prime example of this. I suspect not too many people would've come to church today thinking, "I have a lot of worldly wealth, and as a rich person, I'm hoping today God's going to teach me how a Godly person (who happens to be rich) uses their wealth."

Now, if you **did** come to church with that question on your mind, Praise God – You're ready to hear God's Word...

If not, God's Word isn't going to scratch you where you're itching, but I pray it will incise and pierce, and open you up to the whole realm of the possibility of the activity of The Spirit in your life, in a whole new way (for the glory of God)...

Righto, so earlier in this chapter (2 weeks ago), there was a word for those who **want** to be rich. They **desire/crave** to be rich. They're obviously not finding their contentment in Christ – they're craving contentment in worldly stuff, and this is a very bad thing...

And we talked about the evil of the prosperity theology that appeals to the base desire of so many, to have worldly riches – the very popular teaching that “God wants to bless you in your finances – God will give you that breakthrough you’ve been waiting for.”

And that’s the sort of teaching that is the **antithesis** (a direct contradiction) (exact opposite) of the Godly teaching of Our Lord Jesus Christ. And yet today: Very popular.

Alright, so the earlier word, was for those who **want** to be rich.

Today’s message, is for those who **are** rich...

Now, I don’t presume to know your finances. Some of us are more rich than others; Some of us have less than others...

And some of you might be thinking, “This is a message for that person – They’re rich.” And they’re probably thinking exactly the same thing about you...

The fact of the matter, is by world standards, every one of **us** is rich. If I have a place to live and food on the table, we are not the poor...

*The reason “turning back the boats” becomes an election issue every election is because **many** refugees wanting to come to Australia, are actually “financial refugees”. They*

know that even if they had to live on welfare, they would be far better off:

- *nicer home;*
- *less crowded home;*
- *better fed;*
- *better education;*
- *better health care;*

By world standards, the very poorest Australian, is rich.

So, let's not delude ourselves with a feeling that this passage isn't scratching where I itch. I **should** be itching here... As someone who **is rich**, I should be **wanting** to know, "What's Godly living look like for me?"

Well, the first thing is, a Godly person understands "**true wealth**"... As disciples of Jesus – as a people whose eyes are fixed on eternity, we understand, that **true** riches endure – we're talking about eternal blessings.

That's why Paul doesn't just say, "This is a word for the rich". Because even if I have nothing in this world, we are rich in Christ... He says, "**As for the rich in this present age**"... Alright, so he's talking about worldly riches / money / possessions / assets / lifestyles.

Some of the poorest poor (in this present age), will be **rich beyond measure** in the life to come. Not **because** they are poor now, but because they are blessed to have Jesus as their Saviour.

And for those who **are** rich (in this present age), Paul tells Timothy, to **charge** them with this... (Now, to charge them, doesn't mean it's an optional extra – it doesn't mean “If I feel ‘moved’ to this, I'll do it” – It's a **command**...) What is the command?

When a person has wealth, you've probably noticed that wealth has a tendency to affect their outlook or attitude towards others:

With wealth, some people develop:

- An elevated sense of worth/importance; and
- An elevated sense of security.

Isn't it strange that with wealth, comes an elevated sense of entitlement – I'm worth more than you...

e.g.

- When a person is killed in an industrial accident, the payout for a rich person will be more than for a poor person. Why? Because one of the factors in determining the payout, is their earning capacity. A rich person could've earned more in the 50 years they have left to live...
- The rich might choose to live in a 'gated community' so they don't have to mix with the riff-raff who might walk by on the street;

- Their children go to an elite school where they get the very best of education and the best opportunities – they won't have to mix with the urchins;
- They like to holiday on a private island so they don't have to share the beach with a bunch of bogans;
- They do not like to take “No” for an answer – If I can afford it, I should be allowed to have it.

And so the command is: “**Charge them not to be haughty**”. You know what? Because we are rich, that doesn't mean we are better than those who are poor. We don't deserve better things. Nor should we be elite...

I have some Christian friends who I suspect they might be rich, but they are the most down-to-earth people. If you met them down the street, you'd have no idea they were rich. Their clothes probably come off the rack at Target. And they genuinely love people and connect with people from all levels of society. When they go on holidays, you won't find them at some elite resort – they'll be in a simple campsite with just the basics.

There's nothing haughty about them. And that's what I love about them.

The second thing, is an elevated sense of security.

When a person has nothing, they totally depend on the Lord (they have to). But when one has money and assets, that's

what they pin their hopes on. But the thing is, riches are uncertain... They're uncertain in this life. *The Australian Stock Market has lost about 14% in the last 2.5 months.*

People are worried that the value of property is going to go down. Riches in this life, are uncertain. Even if you put all your money into gold, that can be stolen...

But in the long-run, riches are not only uncertain – they're worth nothing...

A rich man filled some ports with cash and gold and stored them in the attic, and told his wife, "That's so, if I die in my sleep, as I go up to heaven, I can grab the bags as I go past."

As it turns out, one night he did die in his sleep. And his wife goes up to the attic and sure enough, the bags of loot are still there. "You stupid man. I told you, you should've put it in the basement if you wanted to get it on the way past." ...

So, let's not be haughty, and let's not trust in riches, but being a Christian doesn't mean we have to take a vow of poverty either. Living the Christian life, isn't about asceticism where we deny ourselves of all physical pleasures, hoping that somehow, this is going to make me better with God...

No. It says here that we set our hopes on **God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy**.

The Lord wants us to enjoy our lives. He wants us to enjoy the things He provides us with... Is it a sin for a Christian to

have something and to experience enjoyment in it? No... The **sin**, is to not find contentment in Christ...

But here, Paul is opening up to us who are rich, what **Godly** enjoyment of wealth looks like... You see, as Christians, the way **we** enjoy what God has richly provided for us, is **not** the same as the self-indulgence of the ungodly...

If God (in His Grace) richly provides for us, Godliness in us is expressed by richly sharing. Are you with me? If it's a Godly thing for God to provide, it's a Godly thing for **us** to share.

The rich, are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share...

- Some enjoy using their wealth, to amass more wealth. And they use that, to gain more;
- Some enjoy using their wealth to have the latest gadget;
- Or to have a work of art they can enjoy viewing;
- Some use their wealth to travel and have an adventure they can enjoy;
- Some enjoy using their wealth to build the opulent mansion and to surround themselves with luxuries...

And different people are different, And what gives me enjoyment, might be very different to you...

But a **Godly** use of wealth, can be enjoyed, much more than any of these things...

A **Godly** use of wealth is to do good;

And it's not an impersonal good...

e.g. There are some very wealthy people in the world. And some of them (out of the excess that they have), do a fair bit of good... But except for a short-term serving at a soup kitchen, or maybe a photo-op of them nursing some orphans in a third-world country,, they're not really "hands-on" in good works... After the photo-op, they return to their luxury yacht in the Caribbean.

Do you know what I'm saying? As disciples of Jesus, **we ourselves** do good – we don't outsource the doing of good by delegating it to others and paying them to do it on our behalf – We don't simply sponsor a child overseas and decide "There you go – I've done my bit"... We take the time (personally), to do good.

Now, that doesn't mean that you personally have to pull-up-stumps and move to a third-world country and set up an orphanage... (unless God is leading you to that) There's plenty of good to be done in our patch... And sometimes people flee the life that God has given them, thinking that they can only do good somewhere else.

Something I've noticed, is the richer we get, the more what we have, consumes us. Our wealth consumes us such that we don't have time to simply go and help someone else (who needs our help)... And the richer we get, the more we head off to enjoy what we have, and the less personal service we do for others... Not because we don't want to – we just simply don't have time...

- I'm too busy in my job;
- I'm too busy in my retirement;
- I'm too busy in my hobby;
- I'm too busy in my sport;
- I'm too busy in my travels...

But a **Godly** use of wealth, means “**I personally, do good.**”

During the week, the Courier Mail had this Garfield cartoon ... For those who are listening to the podcast, the world's most selfish cat (representative of all cats) says:

- *When I think about doing good and helping others,*
- *I ask myself a simple question,*
- *“What's in it for me?”ⁱ*

But a Godly use of wealth means “I personally, do good – not because of what's in it for me, but because that's Christ-likeness.”

Thirdly, a Godly use of wealth, is to be generous. It means to give, and it means we might even give what we're going to miss...

Some of the most generous people I know, don't have much themselves. And maybe that's part of the reason they don't have a lot – it's because they're generous...

I remember, a church I used to be in, an ordinary working-class couple (with a family of young children) sold their home (that they were still paying off) to buy a different home (that

would leave them with a bigger mortgage), and they said, “We want to give some of this to God”. And they donated 10% of the sale price of their house, to be used in the mission of the church... To me, that was generous, they were giving, not out of their abundance, but simply because they could... And I don't know if that couple have paid their house off yet. I have no idea. But they were generous...

But in the church, sometimes the rich need to be reminded to be generous. I'll tell you why.

The rich have had to learn to be careful. When others **know** that you have wealth, you're a target. And so, the wise are very aware that there's plenty of people who are more than willing to relieve them of some of that wealth...

They know there's:

- Conmen out to get them
- The unscrupulous are looking for some wealth to shift to them;
- And they're concerned that others aren't going to do their fair share in donating to the church, or in sharing with the poor,,,

And so they hold back from being generous, and so they're afraid that if they're generous, others won't give their fair share....

And I can confidently tell you, that in the 30 years that I've been involved in running churches, without exception, the biggest givers, the most generous people in the church, have not been those with the most wealth... And in fact, sometimes

those with the most wealth, are so careful not to make sure that they're not being taken advantage of – they're so careful to make sure others are doing their bit, and that the church budget won't be largely dependent on them,,, that they give not only the smallest portion of what they have, but sometimes, some of the lowest givers in the church, are those who God has given the greatest capacity to give...

And so, to we, the rich, God's word is, "Be generous".

And be ready to share.

Being ready to share, doesn't mean that we only

- Share out of our excess;
- Or even sharing from our wealth...

It's about sharing life. It's about loaning to others, what we have, and it's about bringing others into our fellowship....

The Greek word here for "being ready to share", is *κοινωνικός*, (*koinōnikous*). Now, some of you will know that "koinonia" means "fellowship". The idea is for the rich to not only share what they have, but of *their personal involvement and sharing of themselves*ⁱⁱ.

V¹⁹ thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

That (of course) is from the teaching of Jesus. **Matthew 6:(ESV) ¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where**

thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Alright, so by being generous and by being ready to share, we take hold of that which is truly life, which is this eternal blessing, but it's more than that – it's something that begins now.

Life isn't meant to be “a drag”. We're meant to get enjoyment out of life. And this is a godly thing, because our Lord gets great enjoyment... Jesus told us that the repentance of one sinner, brings great rejoicing in heaven...

- The Lord has great enjoyment in saving the sinner.
- It pleases the Lord, when His people do good.
- The Lord delights in His people and in their welfare.

As we increase in Godliness, the things that grieve God, will grieve us as well. And the things that God enjoys, we'll enjoy them too...

You see, it's not only about “joy” – it's about “enjoyment” – two different words in the Greek. Joy is independent of our circumstances – our Joy is in The Lord and in the eternal hope we have in Him.

“Enjoyment” is about having a satisfaction as we go through life. Where the Bible talks **most** about “enjoyment”, is in

Ecclesiastes... Ecclesiastes, is a man, searching for meaning in life... And he sees one of the greatest injustices in life, is to strive and work hard to acquire what we have, but not be able to enjoy it.

God gives us things to enjoy... And as Ecclesiastes wrestles with all of this, he comes to his wise conclusion (right at the end)

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

As we become more Christ-like, we will find enjoyment, in what God finds enjoyment...

As the Holy Spirit in us, transforms us to become more Godly, we become more joyful... But not only will we be more joyful – our **enjoyment** is found in different things. We will discover enjoyment in what brings God enjoyment...

You see, something tells me that God would get more enjoyment in:

- a child being comforted (after they've skinned their knee), than driving a Ferrari at 200km/hr;
- sharing a meal and a board-game with a lonely (seemingly friendless) person, than going to a 5star restaurant; and

- taking time out of my busy schedule, to purposely visit someone in my own community because I want to talk to them about Jesus, than taking an island holiday...
- out of me unexpectedly turning up at my neighbour's place to have a cup-of-tea, than buying the neighbour's place...

You see, a Godly man/woman will find enjoyment in being Godly:

- Not being haughty;
- Having a genuine enjoyment in the love and company of others from all levels of society;
- Having an enjoyment in seeing God provide for what they need;
- An enjoyment in doing good works;
- Being generous;
- Ready to share what they have and sharing life itself...

That's Godliness... The Godly enjoy these things...

And as we live this out, this is taking hold of that which is truly life.

Really, worldly cravings are often about looking for a better or different life...

- Ahh, that's the life;
- I want to be truly living...

There's a few smatterings from some Real Estate articles and adds:

- Discover Rural Living;
- The Good life;
- Your invitation to live well;
- A new way of life;
- On course for retirement living;
- Downsize to a bigger life...

What's the common factor? A search for life – better life – living...

But by using our wealth in a Godly way, that is taking **hold of that which is truly life.**

Righto, let's finish up.

As we come to the end of Paul's first letter to Timothy, he sums up the whole letter, but I think he's also summing up this section of the letter. And it's very personal.

²⁰ O Timothy,

As the pastor & teacher of the church in Ephesus, Timothy has more than a few challenges. And the main challenge he has, is dealing with the false teachers.

They teach what they claim to be “knowledge”. And that's a common thing you find in churches today. And to some it's very appealing. They might say, “God revealed this to me”... Or “God revealed to me, that this is what this Bible passage really means.” And it's never what it meant at all.

You know what? There is no secret knowledge. It's all here in God's word, as clear as a bell. And Paul says, **Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge,"**

It's not knowledge at all.

- It's irreverent (Profane – unholy – unspiritual – ungodly)
- It's babble (chatter – lots of words, of no spiritual depth);
- It's contradictions.

The Greek word there is ἀντιθέσεις (antitheseis). BTW, "antithesis" is an English word too. And in English, it means exactly the same as the Greek. It's mainly academics who use it, because academics like to use big words that confuse the rest of us, but it means: *a statement which involves direct contradiction, or is logically inconsistentⁱⁱⁱ...*

And as I've said over the last few weeks, some of the teaching being taught in churches today (especially to do with money and possessions), is exactly that – the antithesis of what Jesus taught – It's the exact opposite.

Godliness isn't about "getting more stuff", being blessed with a breakthrough in our finances or whatever... What a nonsense... Our contentment is **not** in worldly things. Our contentment is in Christ and in eternal blessings.

And so Paul says ²⁰ O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you.

This deposit, is like a treasure deposited in a bank, for safe-keeping. It's the greatest investment that God has made into His people – the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ – And the teaching of Jesus and His apostles...

We guard this. It's been entrusted to us... But of course, that doesn't mean we hide it away. We keep it pure; We keep it true... And we profess the truth – we profess this deposit – what God has invested...

By professing false knowledge, some have swerved from the faith. But by keeping and professing the true Gospel, the road to faith is kept straight and narrow.

And so the finishing words remain true: **Grace be with you.**

So, how'd you go with that? Did it scratch an itch you've had for a while? Or has it made you itchy all over, and now you're keen to enjoy Godly generosity and sharing? Just as God enjoys being generous, the Godly enjoy lavishly sharing what they've been blessed with.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
By Your Holy Spirit,
Increase our love for You,
And increase our love for others;
And give us an enjoyment in:

- Doing good;
- Being generous;
- Sharing what we have and sharing of ourselves;

Knowing that this is taking hold of what is truly life.

Lord,
We thank You for the deposit that you have entrusted to us.

Help us to hold firm to the teachings of Jesus and His Apostles.

And the faith that You have granted.

Help us to recognise and avoid the ever so popular antithesis of the Gospel, and all false knowledge and godless chatter that masquerades as godliness today.

And as we hold on to the faith,
we thank You for your promise and pronouncement of Grace,

In the Lord Jesus Christ,

Amen.

ⁱ The Courier Mail - Garfield - Comics - The Courier Mail

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ⁱⁱ Knight, G.W. (1992) *The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press (New International Greek Testament Commentary).

ⁱⁱⁱ Louw, J.P. and Nida, E.A. (1996) *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains*. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York: United Bible Societies.