

St. Paul: On The Same page

09.22.13 Week #265

Day One: Amos 6:1-7

⁴“Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, ⁵who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp and like David invent for themselves instruments of music, ⁶who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! ⁷Therefore they shall now be the first of those who go into exile, and the revelry of those who stretch themselves out shall pass away.”

Have you ever read ads like this? “extravagant butler-manned penthouse suites, gorgeous staterooms, impeccable service, lavishly staged production shows and a floating Caesar's Palace casino... a Feng Shui-inspired spa... the most exclusive collection of boutique restaurants... pillow-top mattresses, fluffy down comforters, flat-screen TVs, DVD players...”

It sounds like the home of Jay Gatsby, but it's

“Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.”

Psalm 145:15-16

actually a cruise vacation targeted at middle class folks who want to feel rich. We want to be self-indulgent.

The bible says that all wealth comes from God, and wealth is not evil in itself. But God calls our values into question. The wealthy of Israel failed to use the good things God gave them for their proper purpose. They failed to care for the poor. And so... they would lose them.

Do you desire wealth? First, ask yourself, “Why?” For what reason do you want good things, and what will you do with what you've been given?

Prayer: *Father, you have given me good things. Now give me a sense of purpose for your gifts. Amen.*

Day Two: 1 Timothy 6:6-19

⁶But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. ¹¹But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.

Jesus warned us in last week's gospel lesson about choosing either God or money as our master. If God is our master, then money will be our servant. But if money is our master, what then?

Money is a hard boss. There is never enough. If money is the master, then we are slaves, and even God becomes subject in our minds to the need for money. We seek God only in order to get more things.

Paul is content with food and clothing. But we are often not content even with our food. Like Goldilocks, it's

too hot or too cold. We look for a nicer restaurant, better service, lower prices. Our coffee is too bitter or too sweet. Our meat is over or under done. And clothing? Don't even get me started.

As a nation, we are discontented. And our discontent comes from seeking the wrong god. Things are foremost, ahead of our Creator.

But because we know Jesus, because we know that this world gives death, but Jesus gives real life, we flee from these things. And we seek what is of greater and more lasting value.

Today you may have put away just a bit more in your retirement account, just a bit more in your 401-k. But what will you invest in your spiritual life with Jesus? Some time in his word, some time spent in prayer, an hour in serving his beloved sheep? Seek these things, and find contentment.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have given me good things. Help me to be content, not because I have these things, but because I have you, and you are the source of all the good in my life. Amen.

Day Three: Luke 16:19-31

¹⁹ *“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores.*

Our nation has been troubled by the growing gap between the rich and the poor. And the difference is quite stark and troubling. Glance again at the description of an ocean cruise in our first devotion and compare that with what we see in the inner city.

But this is nothing new. In Jesus' day also there were rich and poor. And the difference between rich and poor formed the opportunity for love to flourish.

Think of it this way: the only reason that a hydro-electric dam can generate power is if there is a difference between the water level above and below the dam. In the same way, the differences among us give us the chance to serve one another.

So the rich man had the opportunity to show love to poor Lazarus. Those with

knowledge have the chance to teach those without. Those who grow food share with those who have none, and those who build things can care for those who cannot. And when we serve one another, when we bridge these differences between us, that's when we display the love that God has shown to us.

Unfortunately, we often prefer to serve ourselves. We idolize ourselves and we jealously guard what we have been given. And the result is the same as a stagnant lake at the top of a dam. We become choked with our filth.

God will care for his own, as he cared for poor Lazarus. But for a short time he gives you the chance to be a part of his caring. You can act in his place to care for others, because he has cared for you. You see, you are the rich man in this story. You have been given forgiveness and eternal life. And you have the best gifts to share.

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, I am rich, but I often feel poor. Help me to see the poor person so close to me who has need of the gifts you have given me. And let me have the joy of doing your work. Amen.

Day Four: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. ¹⁸ They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹ 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.

“As for the rich in this present age...” Who is Paul talking about? I know most of you don’t feel wealthy. In our church there is a big difference in incomes. But any honest look at our wealth has to lead us to conclude that we are all quite wealthy compared to the world around us – even to our community of Ann Arbor!

So let’s say you are a single mom, or unemployed, or handicapped. And yet you have people who are ready to pray for you – people who desire to help you. More than that, you know that you have a direct line to your heavenly Father, the Creator of the World. All of your sins have been forgiven, and you have no guilt to carry this day.

That is not the case for more than half of your neighbors. On the outside they appear so happy. And they should be happy, we think. After all, they have fine homes and nice cars. They have a personal trainer to keep their bodies fit. They eat in nice restaurants.

But take only a little peek behind the curtain and you see that things are not as they appear. Their marriage or family is in fragments. They are always trying to make up for the mistakes of their past. They fear for the future. Or they have no hope of anything beyond the enjoyment of today.

But you are rich, because you know that your past is powerless, and your future is secure in your Savior’s hands. You know that you are loved, no matter how you may have failed. And you will always be loved.

Those who are wealthy, like us, should not be haughty. But we should be humbly grateful and use our riches to bless the poor.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me the gift of charity. Teach me to share love, the gift I have the most. Amen.