

May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord (2Peter 1:2). Amen.

Fill in the blank: “Money can’t buy happiness, but...” “Money can’t buy happiness, but it can buy you a jetski – and have you ever seen anyone sad on a jetski?” “Money can’t buy happiness, but somehow it’s much more comfortable crying in a Porsche than on a bicycle.” “Money can’t buy happiness, but I think it’s only fair to give me some and let me learn that lesson myself.” It is probably fair to characterize this “bumper sticker wisdom” as the bottom line of the old Adam. It is how we have come to be wired. It is this deep-seated conviction within us that ultimately, the solution to any problem, to every problem, is money.

St. Paul today pours ice buckets of cold water down the back of that sentiment. Rubbish, he says. Nonsense, he claims. Not true, he shouts. It’s all bosh. A deception, a ruse; a sham, a snare; a trick, a trap, a lie. Dear friends, what leg does Paul have to stand on? What justifies his bold defiance, his intrepid denial of the all-pervasive notion that money just makes life better? For you see, you had better know, for one day you will be ministering to people who will find it hard to believe you. Their old Adam will be shouting you down. Even so, you will need to speak about money and Christians, money and faith, money and life. Don’t think you can get away from that one. There are simply too many texts in the Scriptures that speak about wealth. And one day, like many pastors, you might well have to choose between money and ministry yourself. Either way, there’s no getting around it. And you will soon find out: Preach about sex, and you touch a nerve. Preach about money, and you will hit where it hurts.

‘Why,’ we say, ‘whatever for? Money solves your problems. It does not add to them. If you have money, you can buy solutions, you can buy politicians, you can buy the police, you can buy whatever you might possibly need and a lot more. So surely that is the path to happiness?’ No, says the Lord. No, say His Word. This is not the path to happiness at all. Perhaps we should ask those who are wealthy how they feel about it. Shall we do that? Let us turn to the words of one of the most wealthy people who ever lived, the man who had it all – sex and money and rock ‘n roll. I am speaking, of course, of King Solomon. If you want a cold dose of reality, a cold shower of truth, then read what he writes in the book

of Ecclesiastes. It is a harsh description of the futility of “life under the sun,” the life of riches, pleasure, and leisure, of all that we think we want and that would ultimately make us happy; possessions, wealth, wine, women, you name it, Solomon had it. He’d been there, done that, and got the T-shirt. Solomon summarizes the life of wealth with one word: Vanity. Emptiness. Nothing. Chasing after the wind.

How can this be? Why is this so? It is because money is not in the first instance about the potential for happiness, but rather about the reality of worship. In this world, money does not present you with first article gifts, but rather with first commandment temptations. Allow me to quote what Dr. Luther writes in the LC on the commandment “You shall have no other gods”: “Many a person thinks that he has God and everything in abundance when he has money and possessions. He trusts in them and boasts about them with such firmness and assurance as to care for no one. Such a person has a god by the name of “Mammon” (i.e., money and possessions), on which he sets all his heart. This is the most common idol on earth. He who has money and possessions feels secure, and is joyful and undismayed as though he were sitting in the midst of Paradise. On the other hand, he who has none doubts and is despondent, as though he knew of no God. For very few are to be found who are of good cheer and who neither mourn nor complain if they lack Mammon. This care and desire for money sticks and clings to our nature, right up to the grave.” (LC 1)

Dear saints, what God’s Word has to say on money, it has to say to all, to rich and poor alike. Where it speaks on money, it is speaking not only to those who have it. It speaks to all. We must be very clear on this: God’s Word does not condemn wealth, nor does it condemn the wealthy for having money. In fact, here in this very chapter the Lord will go on to address rich people who are certifiably baptized believers on the path to everlasting life. So the sin does not lie in having money. We must be careful to avoid spurious alternatives here. It is not: Poor + blessed vs. rich + damned, or poor + happy vs. rich + unhappy. No, the problem is not wealth at all, nor is the solution poverty. Rather, the problem lies in wanting riches, in desiring wealth, in loving money. And it is not just a problem; no, it is a death trap, a snare that lures believers to leave the path of salvation and into the quicksand of deadly desire, like desert travellers who run after mirages of water only to die of thirst. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evils. This is the problem; this is the threat; this is the trap. For the rich – and for the poor. It is like the

millions of suckers buying lottery tickets all the time in the vain hope of striking it big and getting rich quick; not only are the chances just about nil, but those who do win do not remain happier after striking it big. "One famous study suggested that lottery winners and people who had suffered paralyzing injuries were about equally happy after they had adjusted to the changes in their life." (quote by Pastor W. Cwirla)

Just like the problem is not the one we might expect, neither is the solution. "Before we can get riches right, we need to get God right. We need to die, to drop dead to our stuff, our riches, our wealth. We need to repent of the idolatries that cause us to hang onto things with a death grip. Jesus ... came from the riches of heaven to the poverty of our life. He became poor for our sakes. He became our Sin. He died our death. He gave up father and mother and sister and brother and lands and houses. He was tempted by Satan that all the kingdoms of the world and their glory and riches could be his for one little act of worship. He refused. Instead, He chose the way of the least, the way of poverty and weakness and loss." (PWC) Money is not the solution to the problem, because the problem is not the lack of money or the having of it; the problem is the lack of God and the worship of God. And so the solution begins by turning to God in repentance.

Again: The solution is not to become a nihilist and to seek nothing, nor to marry Lady Poverty and become a member of a mendicant order, embracing poverty for life. The solution lies in faith in Christ, in receiving from the hand of God not only forgiveness, life, and salvation, but also His love in temporal things and 1st article gifts as well. To look to God for all good, to receive it from His hands daily, and to be content with that. After all, if God is the creator and source of all wealth, all riches, all treasure, is it not then far better to have Him? For if you have Him, you have all treasure, but if you lose Him, you lose everything that is good, for there is no good apart from Him.

Paul reminds us: We brought nothing into this world, and we will take nothing out. Butt-naked we come, and butt-naked we will go. "Funeral hearses don't come with Venter trailers." All you can take with you when you leave this world is the life and immortality Jesus gives through faith. And that is true, lasting wealth. So seek in this world not after wealth, but after contentment instead. Ask God to give it you. Pray for contentment. And rejoice in it. God will give it to you, for He delights in answering prayer. Be faithful in big tasks and in little, but look to God for all good. Pursue righteousness and godliness, faith and love, steadfastness and gentleness. Desire these things; crave after them; chase

them, seek them, hunt them down. Spend your time with these things. Show your congregation members the better way. Flee the evil; run after the good. Contentment. That's God's gift. Contentment. A heart that comes to rest in God, peace that comes from rejoicing over what you have. There is great gain in godliness with contentment. ... If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. At the end of this world, or when this life comes to an end, then the idol of mammon will be exposed for the worthless fraud that it is. If all you have then is mammon, then you have nothing. At that point the only currency that will not fail is the precious blood of Christ. So then, that is the treasure we value and the value we seek. All else we ask from Him, for whoever receives Christ also receives with him all things from God. Therein lies true contentment – and true happiness. Amen.