

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Where do You Anchor Your Trust?

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19, KJV 1900)

We live in a dreadfully materialistic society. People are awe struck by titles that go with names, by the prestigious address where a wealthy person lives, by the splendor of a luxury home, or by other external indications of wealth. Both unbelievers and Christians are quite vulnerable to this problem. James even cautions his readers about their reaction to a wealthy person who enters the church assembly. (James 2:1-9)

Directly across the street from our church is a home for indigent people with mental problems. Over the years many of these people who are permitted to leave the facility during the day have visited our church. We have encountered some interesting people, sometimes very disturbed people, but at other times very loving, devoted people. Sometimes they come for our church services; sometimes they only come for coffee or potluck lunch. Our members are gracious to them, a behavior that makes me thankful for our godly members. One of these men was a high official with the U. S. government. When he died, he requested that I preach his funeral and that the service be held in our church building. Our building was packed full of people who remembered this little man. Quite often at the end of our service, he would ask to speak, and he would often speak through tears of joy. He truly blessed us richly by his presence and by his loving response to the preaching and fellowship in our church. The fact that he no longer had a penny to his name, or the sharp mental capacity that marked his career didn't bother our folks. They ministered to him with loving grace.

The last eighteen years of my secular career were invested in starting and building a business. Often I worked around people who had made millions. Thus, I had occasion to observe these people quite closely. Their accumulation of wealth didn't insulate them from disease, from aging, or from the danger of losing their wealth to bad investments or to bad economic times. When they lost funds, their reactions were strong and depressing to observe. I can only imagine how depressing it might have been to have been living in their skin. The one thing they trusted most slipped right out of their grasp, try as they might to keep it and to increase it. Occasionally I would encounter

a man who, though he had been quite successful in his business, understood the uncertainty of money and possessions. These men were fascinating to observe. I truly learned from them simply by observation, though at times I would find an opening to talk to them about God and about life.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God.... The word "Charge" equates to a command, not a mild suggestion. For Paul, this wise counsel to the wealthy was vital. They needed to hear it from a pastor whose values were anchored in God, not in the wealthy man's pocketbook. "Highminded" carries the idea of a haughty, arrogant attitude. The materialistic person who has made his fortune and feels smug about it could easily fall into this kind of attitude. He might not say it in these words, but his mindset might effectively say, "God helps those who help themselves, and I helped myself. Don't ask me for help. Go out and make it on your own the way I did."

At the very moment when the carnal wealthy person embraces an arrogant attitude, he could easily experience the loss of everything he thought he securely possessed. "Uncertain" is an appropriate word to define any material possession. Study the lesson that Jesus taught regarding the man who decided to tear down his barns and build bigger ones. (Luke 12:18 and context) Unlimited funds in the bank, a **supposedly** wise investment scheme (How did Madoff's clients fare?), or the choicest real estate holdings; none of these possessions can prevent a heart attack or cancer, can they?

Paul's use of "...uncertain riches..." at least implies an opposite kind of riches, those that are certain. Didn't Jesus teach this truth?

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. (Matthew 6:19-20, KJV 1900)

The context of these verses is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, rich lessons that He taught His disciples regarding how to live godly, God-honoring lives in the here and now, not how to get to heaven when they died. We deposit our funds in a bank account, but we do not need to go to the bank every time we need to withdraw or use those funds. In the spiritual lesson that Jesus teaches, we are directed to "invest" our lives in heavenly things, to "Lay up treasure in heaven...." Then when we face trials in life, we may readily draw from those treasures to meet the demands of life's struggles. Even Paul needed to be reminded of this truth. When he first faced the "thorn in the flesh," (2 Corinthians, twelfth chapter), he begged the Lord to remove it. Eventually the Lord reminded Paul that His grace was sufficient for Paul to endure the thorn. We have no record that this thorn, whatever it was, went away, but Paul's treasure in heaven, God's grace, the same as your treasure, was sufficient to "Pay the bill" of personal demands that the thorn extracted from Paul.

... *but in the living God...* Sadly, many wealthy people who ridicule the idea of God or of a life of faith that anchors in Him, even as they mock the idea of God, make themselves slaves to their own gods. Paul may have injected a touch of irony here. Folks trust in their dead gods, when they should trust in the one and only **living God**. Remember the Old Testament lesson of Gideon. (Judges, chapters 6-8) Before Gideon could drive out the invading Midianites, he must eliminate the dead gods in his own family's life. The morning after Gideon had torn down his family's altar to Baal the local citizens were ready to kill him. Gideon's father intervened with a great truth. If Gideon tore down Baal's altar, and if Baal is really a god at all, let Baal deal with Gideon. Let Baal plead for himself. Since Baal was a dead god, Gideon had nothing to fear. Gideon then turned more seriously to the work that the "Living God" had called him to do. The living God didn't need people to speak for Him. He appeared to Gideon and told him precisely what He had called Gideon to do. Though a champion of faith (Hebrews 11:32), Gideon sadly forgot this lesson later in his life. The eighth chapter of Judges is a sad commentary on the life of a man who had so faithfully believed and obeyed in his earlier days, but who lost that vision with time.

...*who giveth us richly all things to enjoy...* What a way to make the point! At God's storehouse of "Certain riches" that time, natural disasters, or unscrupulous investment advisers cannot erode, God doesn't look at your balance sheet or your investment portfolio before He gives. To His believing child, He always gives richly and freely.

Interestingly, in most cases, "uncertain riches," though gained with the idea of endless enjoyment, most often impose a high price of anxiety onto those who sacrifice their lives to gain them. In powerful contrast, God's "Certain riches" come to us with the specific intent in His giving them, that we

enjoy them as tokens of His love and grace. The more you gain of uncertain riches the more worry you buy. The more you receive—and acknowledge—of God's certain riches the more enjoyment you realize.

Although we live in a fallen, broken world because of sin, this world still belongs to our God. He has given it to His people, not to own, but to enjoy richly as His gift to us. I can't buy a square inch of Yosemite National Park, but I can take my cup of coffee out by the river early in the morning and watch God's sun rise on His outdoor sanctuary, enjoying amazing fellowship with Him. What riches we have from our loving God.

Too often, I have observed almost as much failure in believers who didn't possess wealth as in those who do. If we possess wealth—or if it possesses us—we have one set of problems. If we do not possess it, but we crave it and feel resentful toward those who have it, we have another equally evil problem. Perhaps the jewel of godly contentment lies at the crown of God's rich gifts to us in this life. Whether we have millions or we stretch for money to pay next month's bills, we need to live in the constant realization of God's certain riches and seek contentment with Him and in our present state, seeking only to wisely and thankfully use—enjoy—those certain riches that He has given to us.

The whole "Grass is greener" somewhere else attitude grows out of our failure to come to the full realization of godly contentment with our divine assignment. My father-in-law, a decent and a good man, suffered from a major case of this infectious "Bug." He so often moved from one place to another, always thinking that he'd discover his fortune "there" but not "here," that his sons-in-law teasingly called him the Johnny Appleseed of California. He'd buy a rundown house and lot and busily transform it inside and out. He had a "Green thumb," so he typically covered the lot with fruit trees and a little garden. Just as the trees reached maturity and were ready to produce more fruit than he and his family could consume, another "Grass is greener" bug would bite him, he'd sell that place, and start over again somewhere else.

We see this same "Grass is greener" bug biting church people. They are those sad souls who are world champions at finding fault with the church of their present membership, so they use all these faults to rationalize leaving this church and moving to another region for the ideal church that they discovered over there. What happens in the long-term? They typically mirror my father-in-law's pattern. For a while, they live in the fantasy that they've discovered the Promised Land, but, as time wears on them, they fall right back into the same old habit. The list of faults with that new church is just as long and just as grievous in their minds as their old church, so off they go looking for that elusive perfect church. They never find it for long, because they failed to learn the fundamental lesson

of godly contentment. There are no perfect churches, but each of us should face our divine assignment. Invest in God's certain riches and work to "perfect" the church, the career, the marriage, the life that we now live. Live to enjoy what we have and to thank God for His rich gifts, all given to us to be cherished and enjoyed. What a difference—what a transformation—this simple change in our disposition will make.

Our study passage deals with the danger of wealthy people trusting in their uncertain riches, but the principle is far broader. When people trust in anything other than God, they live with a permanent discontent that longs for satisfaction. But, apart from trusting in God, no satisfaction ever comes, so they wander from career to career, from place to place, from spouse to spouse, or from church to church. Sadly, whatever changes they make in their lives, they often fail to make the one change that would make a difference. They never stop trusting in anything and everything other than the one they should trust, God. When this empty pursuit rules the life, satisfaction, godly contentment, always eludes the pursuer.

We have more to learn from this passage. Are we all ready to learn what God intended in it for us? If someone announced a crazy scheme with the promise that it would triple our investment in a year, people would flock to learn more. Hasn't God promised unlimited blessings from His "Certain riches"? Why then don't we start investing more time and energy looking into His faith-walk, to trusting in His "Certain Riches"?

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor