

Using Riches for Enjoyment

1 Timothy 6:17-21 (NIV)

¹⁷ Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. ²⁰ Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, ²¹ which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all.

What do you need to be rich? Top Google result said that you need \$1 million in liquid assets. A survey from Charles Schwab financial services says that you need \$2.2 million to be considered wealthy in the US. CNBC says that if you are earning more than \$100,000 a year, then you are in the upper class of wealth. Others say that you can be rich without having a lot of money - if you have financial freedom, not bogged down by debt, having some savings, and a revenue stream to afford non-essentials.

Can I make an easier definition of what it means to be rich? How about if you have more money than what you need to buy essentials? If you can afford to eat out at a restaurant on a monthly or weekly basis, if you have an Amazon Prime account, pay for a streaming service, buy soda or coffee or tea, have more than 2 outfits of clothing, then you are rich because you have extra money that can be used on things for enjoyment. Being rich means that God has words for me and you today: “Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” (verse 17)

When we have more than what we need in terms of money, there are specific temptations that come to us. One of them is to be arrogant regarding our wealth. Do you look at your robust savings account, your ample retirement fund, your nice house, the vacations that you have gone on, the cars you own, your widescreen tv and PS5 on the entertainment center, and inwardly pat yourself on the back? Do you give yourself the credit that you worked hard for them, saved up for them, made wise financial decisions to have these things? Do you look at the fact that you have more money than you absolutely need as a sign that you have lived good and upright and holy, that your riches are a sign from God that you are so good? Is our wealth owed to us? Is God even involved in the riches that we have? If not, why do we need God?

Yet, where did your wealth come from? You worked hard for those things. Good! Who gave you the strength to work? You made wise financial decisions. Good! Who gave you the mind to make those decisions? You seized that job opportunity. Good! Why do job opportunities even exist? This whole world, your body, your mind, your talents – these all came from God who richly provided all of them to us to use for our enjoyment. The credit goes to him, not us, if we have any riches. It’s a humbling truth. God gets the credit, not me.

The other temptation specific to having wealth is to put our hope in it. Do you look to wealth to make you feel secure? Are you on edge, fretting disaster when your money reserves are low or depleted? Do you work non-stop so that you can have financial security and therefore peace of mind? Are you going to university for a job specifically because you can earn the most amount of money doing this, that this will lead you to a happy and fulfilled life? Are you looking to wealth to make you complete, that it will save you?

You don’t need to look long to see how quickly wealth can go away. Companies go under and jobs are lost without the guarantee of another. Identities are stolen. Savings and checking accounts are wiped out. Credit card debt is racked up, and you are unable to pay it back. Investments go sour, and stock markets crash - wiping out what you have saved up. And then there’s the fact that money can’t solve everything. Instead, it often leads to more problems. If we trust in earthly riches to make us complete, to give us meaning, peace, and security, to save us, we will be disappointed. We will be lost.

So, instead of being arrogant about our wealth, giving ourselves the credit for it, and putting our hope in it, thinking that it will save us, Paul tells us: “Put [your] hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” (verse 17) Trust in him over trusting in ourselves, in our wealth, which will only lead us away from God. Put your hope in God because he has already been rich to you – rich by giving you a working body, even if it isn’t working in all the ways that it used to or all the ways that you want it to. Rich by giving you shelter, a home, a place to lay your head – even if they haven’t been the places where you want to lay your head. Rich with all the many meals you’ve eaten in your lifetime – even if they weren’t always at five-star restaurants. Rich with the oxygen you breathe, free of charge, a sun still shining, plants still growing, mountains towering in their grandeur for you to enjoy, stars shining for you to marvel at.

On top of that, God has provided us with everything for our enjoyment. If you've spent riches on a widescreen tv and a Nintendo Switch, on a car, a RV, a movie ticket, a restaurant meal, a book, photography equipment, art supplies, musical instruments, vacations, a Starbucks or Black Rifle Coffee, then you know God has provided you with those riches for your enjoyment. This is incredible! God doesn't just give us the bare essentials, just daily bread and water. He gives us riches so that we can buy things and do things that we enjoy. We aren't called to sell everything and live a poverty stricken, ascetic life. God gives us wealth so that we can enjoy using it.

God has been even richer to you and me by giving himself for us. What does someone's time cost? Some people get paid by the hour, charge by the hour. God gives us his time without charge to us. He is giving his time to us every day to make this world happen, your body continue to work, and he's done this for as long as the world has existed. And, when the time was right, he came down from heaven and took on human flesh and blood to keep all his commands perfectly - not for himself, but for us because we have been arrogant about our wealth and we have put our hope in it instead of in God. For every second of every day for some 33 years, Jesus lived all of that time for you and me, not for himself - all the way from conception to death. He gave his time to richly cover us with his perfect life. Then, with his death on the cross, he paid the price for every single one of our sins, for every single time we did not keep God's commands, every single moment of arrogance over our wealth or putting our hope in riches instead of in God. With his riches, he wiped away our debt of sin. We are richly forgiven and cleansed by what God has richly done for us!

Having God be this rich to us makes us want to be rich to others. So, we are directed by God through the Apostle Paul: "Command [those who are rich] to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life." (verses 18-19)

How does that work? The good deeds we do are a response to God's richness to us. He sees our generosity with our earthly wealth shared with others as fruits of our faith, evidence that we believe in what God has richly done for us. Often, we are so generous without really thinking about God watching us. It's just a natural thing we do because we're blessed with so many riches from God. But he sees them and remembers them, even when we don't. He tells us that he will bring them up on Judgment Day for his and our enjoyment.

Even more, we can use the earthly wealth God has richly provided to us to then show other people a God who is rich to them as well. We do this by being generous, showing people that we care about them – whether we're helping someone in need or giving to our assistance fund and it goes out on behalf of our congregation. We do this by funding the training of pastors and the starting of missions all around the world so that more people can know about the forever riches that God has provided for them. We do this by donating supplies for Bible Camp for the specific purpose of teaching children about how God richly saves us in spite of ourselves. We do this by purchasing school supplies and donating them to EG King Elementary so that people from there know that we care about them, even though we have no obligation to do so. We do this with our angel tree around Christmas time. All these uses of our riches give us a different level of enjoyment as we use our earthly wealth to bring people eternal wealth from God, to help get them to heaven!

God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. We are rich in God. Rich by the things that we have. Rich by the debt of our sin that he paid in full and the gift of total perfection given to us by Christ. These are the riches we enjoy from God and share these riches with others so that they too can enjoy them. Amen.