

Hope Worth Investing In

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Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 0 0] Amen. Well, we come to the end of Paul's first letter to Timothy this evening. Paul's covered ever such a lot of ground in the past six chapters, and all to teach Timothy and this church, all of ye, as he says, as he put it back in chapter three, how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. What kind of church, what kind of family life grows out of knowing the living God through Jesus Christ, his son? That's what we've been thinking about the last few months together, and what we're wrapping up this evening. And so given how far we've come, it's maybe surprising the way that Paul ends speaking again about money. In fact, as I reflected this week, I thought, really, Paul has been speaking about money, finance, ever since the start of chapter five, if you remember, supporting the godly and helpless, which suggests, on the one hand, isn't it, that there was maybe issues in this church in Ephesus to do with money, how the church Christians were using their wealth. I do hope that's one thing we've picked up, looking at a letter like 1 Timothy, that we can learn ever such a lot just by reading a letter like this about the situation that God is speaking into in the first instance, how helpful that is for us, not to take God's word out of context, but to root it in its original setting. So clearly, we can maybe tell that money was a big deal for the church as it was back then. But clearly, too, it doesn't really need to be said, does it, that money is still a really big deal for us? Nobody lives without it, which makes what Paul says, therefore, universally relevant. But perhaps tonight we are sitting here thinking, well, am I really who Paul's speaking to? This is really for me, because look, he says, verse 17, command those who are rich in this present world. Who are the rich that he is speaking to? Now, money is a really sensitive topic.

Okay, we might not want to really think about what is or is not in our bank account, let alone hear about it, let alone talk about it, not least in the day that we live in. The cost of living is shooting up. There is immense pressure on us. But as we gather, we do need to hear what Paul's saying. We need to take it to heart. I don't know where you draw the line that defines being rich. Probably for most of us, a fair bit higher than what we are earning. But that in itself suggests, doesn't it, that there's not a set number that makes you rich. In fact, research shows that being rich or certainly feeling rich depends largely on where we live, how we grew up, who we compare ourselves to, the circles that we move in. And so in our society, we see that we, a great disparity between the wealthiest and the poorest. But then if you were to step back and look at the world at large, this present world, well, many of us would be considered perhaps much richer than we think ourselves. So who is Paul speaking to then? Who is this command for? Well, let me suggest that to the extent, to the extent that you have an income or have money in the bank or in property or have investments, to that extent assume that he is speaking to you. The more we have, the more directly this will apply to us. But to the extent that we handle money in any way, which I assume is all of us this evening, Paul is still teaching us how to handle that money in a godly gospel way. First in our hearts and then with our hands. He gives two commands, doesn't he? One in verse 17, one in verse 18. The first in verse 17 deals with the heart, the second with our hands, what we do with it. And so it's good to come to the first command, which we could summarize like this, guard your heart. Guard your heart, says Paul. Just have a look there again at verse 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. God always, always starts, doesn't he, with our hearts, what we hope in? See that contrast? Don't put your hope in wealth, but put your hope in God. Well, why start there? Perhaps it doesn't seem the most practical place to start, but it is the most sensible because the currency that our lives run on isn't actually money. It is hope.

We hope that we hope that we can keep the house warm. We hope for a nice Christmas. We hope to keep everyone clothed and fed next year. And almost instinctively, we look to the money in the bank to give us those things, to fulfill those hopes. We naturally, as human beings, put our hope in wealth. But Paul is commanding us not to do that. And so the question that he's asking us to ask ourselves is, what do those hopes of ours, those hopes I mentioned, perhaps other hopes that you have tonight, what do our hopes rest on? This is one way our passage tonight is different from our passage last week. If you're thinking, haven't we heard this before? The question last week was, what do we love? The love of money. The problem we saw last time was that a love of money in and of itself, the feeling that we need more and more of it is a problem. Instead of loving God and being satisfied by him, by his gifts. The question this time is similar, but it's different. Not what do we love, but what do we hope in? Now, that's a slightly different function of our hearts.

Now, perhaps last week you sat here, if you were here and you listened to the sermon, you thought, well, that's okay. I don't love money. I don't feel I need more and more. My heart isn't set on cash.

[7:17] But what about the money or the income that you have? How does your heart handle the money that God does give you? Does your hope for the life that you imagine for yourself rest on that money, that income?

Or does your hope rest on the God who gives you all that you have? Our hearts are so complex and tangled in sin that it is perfectly possible for us to love God rather than money. And yet still in our daily lives, hope in money rather than God. What do I mean? Well, we can thank God, can't we, for all that he has given us, and yet worry in the very same breath that it's not going to stretch far enough.

Now, I know, again, said this is a really sensitive topic. It's difficult to talk about in our cultural setting. Part of the reason for that, I think, is because money can worry us. Have you ever, I wonder, not wanted to check the banking app for fear of what you might see or not see in it? When the cash machine asks, would you like to see your balance? Pressed, no. I've been in both those situations at various points in my life. Our guts can tie themselves in knots, can't they, of the thought of what is in the bank. But where does that worry come from? Is it money in and of itself? Or is it because we have tethered our hope to something so uncertain? That is surely where that fear and dread comes from, not from a number on a screen, but the sense that we have that this number is all that we have to fulfill our hopes, dreams, and aspirations in life. That's why we worry, isn't it? Because at some point, our hopes have become wrapped up with our bank balance. Now, if you are worried about money, you should always feel that you can speak to somebody that you trust about it, okay, and not in any way minimizing the legitimate worries that we can have about where our food is coming from, okay, especially in a church setting. Just as God has freed us from pride when we have much, well, so God in Christ has freed us from shame when we have little. In God's family, there should be that trust to share our worries, our anxieties about our daily bread. But Paul's point really is that the uncertainty, the anxiety we can feel about money isn't usually actually to do with how much we have, but whether we have rested our hope on it. And the reason he's addressing those who are rich rather than the church in general or those who are poor is because that temptation to rest our hope on wealth gets worse, not easier the more money we have. To illustrate this thought, if you imagine building a house of cards, and maybe you've done that, you've got to somewhere near the top.

Think how delicately you balance those cards on top of that house. One misjudgment, one misbalance, miscalculation can send the whole thing crashing. But compare that to the fourth road bridge or the rail bridge, okay, immense, impressive, strong structures. Nobody worries, I suppose, driving or riding over those bridges that the bridge is going to collapse under our weight. We just do that.

Well, that's the difference, isn't it, for our hearts between having a lot of money and a little bit of money. Okay, a small bank balance can't hold a lot of hope. But a big bank balance can carry a lot of hope for a long time. And that is a really spiritually dangerous thing, says Paul. The Bible consistently says that wealth is not wrong, okay, it is not sinful, it is a gift from God, but it is also a risk.

[12:00] Because the more we have, the easier it is to rest our hope on money rather than on God. However much we have, however much, money is still fickle. Even the wealthiest worry about finance, investments, debts, mortgages. I suppose because the more you have, the more you have to lose.

The past year has shown us just how unpredictable money can be. Things way outside our control in this room. A pandemic, a war, cost of living, inflation, gas prices, interest rates. And yet in the space of a few months, those things that we have no control over have reset our budgets, our plans, readjusted our hopes perhaps for the coming years. And that is why Paul doesn't just encourage us, but commands us as God's people, those whose trust is in Christ, not to set our hope in wealth that is so uncertain, but rather to put our hope in God who is faithful. And who, look, more than that, richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. If you are not a Christian here tonight, maybe that shocks you. That's not what we usually hear about God, is it? Maybe you think that's the wrong way around. Surely money gives me the life that I want, and God is just there to kind of restrict me and spoil my fun. But Paul is saying, what if money is not like that? What if it can't be trusted to give you the life that you want? And what if that isn't who God is? What if he can, what if he does give a life in all of its fullness to those who trust him and put their hope in him? Paul is saying those are not what ifs, those are truths. Money cannot be trusted to give you the life you want. But God, our creator, our redeemer, can be trusted to give us life in all of its fullness. Now, Paul's made clear throughout this letter, God is in no way tight-fisted. God, who created everything very good, created it, he says, for us to receive it with thanksgiving. That's who God is. We can hope in him without fear, without worry, without dread. And that is how Paul wants the church to live then, in dependence on God alone, resting the full weight of our hope in him for our lives here and now and for the life to come.

Surely that goes for all of us here, Christian or non-Christian, that is what God wants for us. But particularly, the more money we have, says Paul, the more we have in this world, or the more urgent it is, friends, that we learn to divest our hearts of that wealth, of those possessions, and invest our hearts fully in God alone. But in his second command, Paul turns to more practical considerations. He begins with our hearts. But what does hoping in God look like for the way then we handle our money day to day? Well, secondly, his command is, do and give generously. Okay, do you see that there in verse 18? A second command, command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. Okay, there's more than one way to be rich, he says. Be rich in good works out of what God has richly given ye. God is good. His creation is good. His gifts are good. And so, true godliness then, well, it must surely involve us giving and doing good to others, to be like God in that way. Sometimes people talk, don't they, about their good deed for the day, kind of giving back maybe, or paying forward. I don't know if you've heard any of those expressions. But as Christians, the reason why God tells us to do good to others is first and foremost because God has done good to us. There's no sense in our good works, our good living, that we pay him back. We do not pass on his goodness like a voucher for somebody else to cash in. No, we receive his goodness, his gifts with thanks ourselves, his every good gift, supremely the gift of his son in his death and resurrection. And it is in our response to God's incredible undeserved goodness to us that we reflect that goodness to others through our lives. As Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

He is where our good works come from. And we need to know that, and others do too, that this is the overflow of God's never-ending goodness to us. And so, if our hope is in God, if we've got, okay, point one, our hope is in God. We know his rich provision for us and our enjoyment. Well, surely one of the outcomes in our lives will be a desire to do good, to share, to be generous with those in our lives as God gives us opportunity. Now, that goes for any Christian, of course. But again, Paul is still speaking to the rich in this present world, doesn't he command them? And it's a simple point, really. But when you get to quote John Calvin, why not? Calvin puts it so nicely. The command comes to the rich, says Calvin, because a man's opportunities to do good to others increase with the abundance of his riches. So, there you go again. In short, the more you have, the more good you can do with it.

To the extent that we have means, or the greater extent we have to do good with what God has given. Now, that helpfully captures again the sense that this isn't a call to a specific set of rich people to go out and do loads of good, but a principle that is relevant for all of us.

[19:03] Now, I said last week, a Christian's kind of natural posture towards our wealth, towards our possessions, is as Paul said, contentment. Godliness with contentment is great gain. Well, to contentment, Paul adds here, doesn't he, generosity. So, godliness is not just a negative command not to be greedy, but a positive instruction to be generous. In other words, we are not to be content with simply being content. Yes, we should be content with what God gives us. He gives us these

things to satisfy us, but these things are not to stick to our fingers. We are to share them as he has shared with us.

To see what God has given us, not as being ours to own, but what he has put in our hands to use for his glory and for the good of others. So, practically, practically, what could that look like for us? Okay, to share, to be generous with our wealth, our possessions. Now, one way I know that lots of you are really good at here is hospitality, opening your homes, preparing food, putting the heating on, so that you can have people into your homes and feed them. And that is a wonderful way, isn't it?

That we can do good for others, share what God has given us. And that doesn't need to be extravagant. Okay, hospitality could be pizza, okay, bacon rolls, soup, hot drinks and snacks. I think one of the biggest things that sometimes stops Christians from being generous with our homes in a church setting can be the fear that simply having someone in your home isn't enough. Okay, there has to be sort of sourdough bread and three different kinds of handmade desserts and nice drinks.

[21 : 11] And that's really lovely, really is. But we need to know that it's not necessary. Far better for us to share what we do have, rather than not share what we don't have. So do be encouraged in your hospitality, your use of your homes to bless one another and others in your lives. Be creative with it.

But do do it as God gives you opportunity. However you can do it, keep doing hospitality. And there are other ways, of course, to share what we have. Sometimes we gift for somebody on a significant occasion. A meal for somebody who's maybe going through a difficult time. Clothes.

Your children have grown out of them. Plenty children who need lots of clothes. I know lots of you do share what you have in these different ways, partly because Susie and I have benefited from that generosity so very often. And we are so thankful. Not least, of course, because sharing like that tells us that this is God's family. For most people, receiving something that you do not have to make any return for only happens in a family context at home. But we as Christians, God has made us a family. This is his household. And so what an encouragement, what a blessing it is for us to share in that way, expecting nothing in return, and to bless one another, to remind one another that we are indeed God's family. And of course, there is also simply giving money, giving funds to support and to serve others. Now, this is the one thing that I know nothing about this church. And that is what any of you as individuals or families give to the support of the work. There's only two people who actually know that. They're the only two people who need to know that. They are the treasurers, okay, who manage these things. And so I can say with a completely clear conscience tonight, not knowing anything about the giving, that giving to the work of the church is one way that God does call us as

Christians to be generous with what he has given us. What counts as generous in our giving? Well, you may know in the Old Testament, God commanded all of his people to give 10% of their income to the temple, to keep his worship happening, to keep his word being taught, so that all his people in the land, okay, from the poorest to the richest, however much or little they had, they would all be served by the teaching of his word, by the worship of God. Back then, that was a fair way of distributing the cost of keeping the church as it was running. Now, we are not bound, okay, as Christians by that law. We are not bound to give 10% of our income. It's not prescriptive for us as it was for them. But it is still a wise and good benchmark, isn't it, in God's word, to help us to work out what is a fair, a generous level of giving. Some of us might be in a position where we need to give less than that. That is okay. We have freedom in Christ to do that.

Some of us may be in a position where we can give more than 10%. But if you're not sure, well, normally working out what 10% of your income is, is a good place to start. And then begin to adjust it as you need to. Again, the principle is to the extent that God has given to us. He wants us to be generous with it. And so, if you are not in a position to be generous in that way, to give to the work of the church for a time, that is okay. That is okay. If you are struggling for a time, if you are an impoverished student, okay, five, 10 pounds a month, whatever, that is fine. A great illustration of how God values this generosity is in Jesus' observation of the widow's penny. Do you remember this?

[26 : 01] Okay. He saw the widow drop her penny into the box. It didn't look like a lot, but it was to her. And she did it with thankfulness in her heart to God. And Jesus says that was much more valuable to God than the relatively higher giving of a rich, but stingy and thankless Pharisee.

That widow was generous with what she had because God had been generous to her. And so, the lesson is it's erring on the side of generosity with what we have that counts, not the figure that we give. So, let me take this opportunity just at the end of a year to thank those who are giving and giving generously to the work of the church. But also to say, if you are a member of this church, Bon Accord, and you are in a position to give and haven't started doing that, to encourage you to pursue that. There's more information going out in our weekly email. There's actually a more detailed breakdown of our finances in this month's newsletter that you can look at as well.

But know that whatever you give, however much, however little, how much you do for others, in whatever way you are generous or share with others what you have, well, none of that is ever truly lost.

Verse 19, Paul says, Friends, God is no man's debtor. He never gets from us more than he gives. And however generous we might be, it wouldn't matter how much we did for others, how much we gave for others. It pales in comparison to what God is prepared to give us, not only in this life, for all we have is his, but in the life to come, many times more, he promises homes, family, land, treasure in heaven. So, brothers and sisters, what is Paul's command, hope in God, and do and give generously to others.

And in the last two verses, and for our very final point in this series, Paul sums up, I suppose, what we have learned as a whole in this letter. So, he's stepping away from this focus, okay, on giving money. And he's urging Timothy and the church finally to cling to God's grace.

[28 : 59] If you just look at those verses 20 and 21 with me, he writes, Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter, the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all. And so, if Timothy and the church are to be open-handed with what God has given, they are to cling with a tight fist onto the gospel of God's grace. That's what's been entrusted to Timothy's care, and he is to guard it with his life.

And we saw what that is at the climax of this letter in chapter 3. Paul writes, beyond all question is the mystery from which true godliness springs. Here's the source, he says, of everything that we've learned together from this letter. He appeared in the flesh. He was vindicated by the Spirit. He was seen by angels. He was preached among the nations. He was believed on in the world.

He was taken up in glory. That is the source, says Paul, of all godliness. And it is a summary, isn't it, of Christ's finished work, his work on earth. That is what Timothy is to guard above all.

Christ was promised through long ages that he was born, that he lived righteously, that he suffered, that he died for our sins, that he rose on the third day, that he ascended into glory, that he reigns forever and ever. This gospel is the good news of what Christ has done for us, that we might be brought back into the presence of the living God to know and to love and worship him. It's the grace of God to us in that good news that is at the beating heart of a healthy gospel church. Without that, without the gospel, nothing will come of anything that Paul has taught us in this letter, because that is the source, the spring, the root of a godly life, a godly church. And he finishes with this point, doesn't he, that if we get distracted from the gospel, if we should tweak the gospel, forget the gospel, mishandle the gospel, lose the gospel, well, there will be no church of the living God left standing on this site. We saw way back at the beginning, that's where this church in Ephesus had gone so wrong, false teachers teaching a false god. And what kind of god were they teaching?

Well, not the living God we have met. They presented to the church a god who commanded more than he was willing to forgive, who kept hidden more than he was willing to reveal, who held back more than he was willing to give, a god who loved controversy and conflict, who delighted in disorder, distrust, who used strong leaders, not weak servants. And all the bad fruit of this church has grown from that bad root, all because, friends, the gods that they were teaching and worshipping were not the god and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the living God who so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever should believe in him would not perish but have eternal life, life to the full. That is life here and now with God and eternal life in the world to come. This is the real God, says Paul, the God of abundant grace.

And that is why at the close of our time in first Timothy, Paul urges the church, urges us to cling to this God, to cling to his grace and to give no grounds to any twisting of the truth. Because it's only the real God who can save us. It's only the God who created all things, who can give us all things. It's only the God who created all things that we can give us to God who created all things. It's only the God who can save us from our sins, give us eternal life. So what does clinging to him look like

for you as you go from here tonight? Well, if you're here and you're not a Christian, so, so good that you are here. What does it look like for you to cling to Christ? Well, it looks like taking hold of him for the first time, putting your hope in God, putting your trust in Christ and being saved, taking hold of true life.

[34 : 03] And we've seen tonight the emptiness of this world and its promises and the emptiness of the gods of this world that promise much and deliver little. There is only one God who gives life in all of its faithfulness. And he promises to give that life to all who put their trust in his son and his saving death. So would you do that even now? Trust in him for yourself. Take hold of him and have this life that he promises that flows from the cross to sinners like me and ye. At the start of this letter in chapter 1 and verse 15, Paul wrote, here is a trustworthy saying, worthy of full acceptance.

Take this to the bank, he said, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. He came to save people far from God. And if he could save me, says Paul, to the very worst of sinners, that he can save any sinner, even you, even me.

And what about us together as a church? How do we cling to the grace of God held out to us in the gospel? Well, we come back to it weekly, daily even. We speak the truth in love to one another, as we have opportunity in life groups and at other times in the week. We thank God for it in prayer. We sing with gusto when we are together of the grace of God. We read of it in his word. We hear of it in the preaching. We take it out and we share it with the people we know in the world. In short, we let the gospel of God's grace infiltrate everything that we are and do as Christians and as a church. We root our hearts in it and we live out of it together. That's what this whole letter has been about, hasn't it? What kind of church grows out of healthy gospel roots feeding on the grace of God?

[36 : 26] Well, this kind of church in 1 Timothy, this kind of church here at Bon Accord, we living as the family of God together as he has called us. And we pray, don't we, for the Bon Accord of five or ten or hundred years' time that we will still be clinging and all the more firmly to God's grace in the gospel of his Son. Let's pray that for one another. Let's pray that together now.

Gracious Father, how we thank you for the gift of your Son. Father, we praise you that he who was rich beyond measure became poor, so that we, through his poverty, might become rich. Father, we thank you that you have filled us in him, that in him we do have life to the full. We thank you for your every good and every perfect gift to us. Father, forgive us, we pray, when we take for granted all that you give us for our enjoyment, for our sustenance. Father, we thank you for each and every day. We owe our lives to you. And Father, how we pray that you would help each of us to put our hope in you. Father, free us, deliver us, we pray, from rooting our hope in the things of this world that are so uncertain.

Father, we pray that you would help teach each of us to root our hope in Christ. Keep us looking to him, we pray. And Father, pray that as a church you would build us up in that faith. Pray, Father, in the coming year that you would knit us together as a church family, help us to serve one another, and to love one another generously as you teach us. Father, we pray that you would continue to provide for us everything that we need for life and for godliness in and through your Son.

And Father, we pray that you would continue to bless this church. Father, we do not know the future, but we trust in a faithful God. And how we pray, Father, that in five or ten or a hundred years' time, that your people will still be worshipping you here, that people would still be coming to faith, to know you for the first time through the witness of this church. Father, keep us, we pray, grow us. Help us in our hope not to have low expectations, but high expectations of what you do when we put our trust in you. Do us good, we pray and ask in Jesus' name. Amen.