

## **The Pursuit of Everlasting Happiness**

1 Timothy 6:6-19

INI

The riches of God's grace in Christ to you from Him who dwells in approachable light, who also appears in approachable flesh full of grace and truth, the King of kings and Lord of lords. Amen.

God has caused all Scripture to be written for our learning. We pick up again in Paul's exhortation and instruction to Pastor Timothy, an exhortation that speaks to God's people – to you,

**1 Timothy 6:6–19** <sup>6</sup> Now godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. <sup>8</sup> And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. <sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. <sup>11</sup> But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. <sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup> I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, <sup>14</sup> that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, <sup>15</sup> which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup> who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. <sup>17</sup> Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, <sup>19</sup> storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

**We pray: O Lord, let the riches of Your Word abound within us; free us from all that burdens and binds us; and grant unto us that righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience and gentleness which comes only by Your Holy Spirit. Amen.**

## **The Pursuit of Everlasting Happiness**

1. Flee the pursuit of that which perishes
2. Pursue for the fight for lasting riches

Our declaration of independence – “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

It is our declaration of independence. It shapes the American mindset. It is inscribed in the American dream. The pursuit of happiness is not only a way of life, it is a right that we declare cannot be taken away; it is unalienable. The pursuit of happiness.

We recognize in a certain secular sense, this is true. We expect our government to promote certain freedoms that agree with natural law. We do not want our government to shape our future for us as they deem best. We want the government to promote the freedom for a person to pursue whatever goals and happiness they desire – so long as they don’t conflict with good order and moral uprightness. We want a fair and just government.

However, let’s consider this from a different perspective – should the right to pursue earthly happiness shape the Christian mindset? Should it be inscribed in your goals and dreams? We consider today God’s declaration: not an unalienable right, but a gift. A gift of His grace that comes through Jesus Christ. We consider today how your mindset, your goals, your dreams are all shaped and inscribed in Christ. We consider: the pursuit of everlasting happiness.

### **1. Flee the pursuit of that which perishes (vv.6-10)**

Marketing specialists will tell you that the goal advertising is to tell a relatable story. Good advertising strives to tell a story in which you can see yourself. So they tell a story of a family. A husband in the 1970’s who purchases a house. A photograph appears which shows him with his 70’s mustache and his wife next to him. Then another photograph, kids along side of them. Then a car appears in the drive way. Then another photograph, a family grown up. And the commercial closes with an aged couple on that same couch, kids and grandkids all around. Behind it all – an investment firm. They suggest that if you invest with them, this could be your story.

In the catechism it comes last among the commandments: “coveting.” So often it comes last in our minds too. Marketing appeals to it. They tell a story in which you can see

yourself. It is the story of what you deserve, what life could look like, if only ... It is your right to pursue happiness. Last among the commandments are those directives that sneak up in places we'd last expect them – thou shalt not covet.

It could be a person. It could be a goal. It could be a status. It could be a lottery ticket or a slot machine. When we see ourselves in some other story than what God has given us ... When we see ourselves in a story that is scripted only by what earthly goals we achieve ... When we begin to think in terms of how our life should look; how our kids should look; how our bank account should look – we are beginning to see ourselves in someone else's story; we are beginning to covet what is not ours. The Bible defines it – the pursuit of a happiness which does not belong to me and which is not found in Christ. The Bible names it – coveting.

*<sup>6</sup> Now godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. <sup>8</sup> And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. <sup>9</sup> But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.*

We brought nothing in. We can take nothing out. As Job said, “naked I enter; naked I exit.” What is it that we carry with us in between? We are in between right now – in between birth and death. We are given this time of grace in which to set our goals, shape our pursuits, inscribe a dream in our mind. Will our goals, pursuits and dreams truly bring us lasting happiness?

Let's not misunderstand what God is saying here. It is not earthly happiness that is the primary issue. Sometimes as Lutherans we get the idea that it is wrong to be happy. It is not wrong to have nice house or a responsible retirement package. In and of themselves, these things are not sinful. They are just things – gifts from God.

It is the love, the pursuit, the desire that concerns God – these are at the root of our sins against the 9th and 10th commandments. We might call it – discontentment. The Bible calls it “idolatry.” Anytime we cling to a security and happiness that rests not in God's free gift; we cling to an idol.

For all these things will perish. If clung to as the hope for happiness, these things will drag us to destruction with them. It will trap us like an anchor tied to our ankles. And

when we throw that anchor over board thinking this will steady us in the storms of life, what happens? Feet first, overboard. Drowning in a fleeting pursuit of happiness.

But ... godliness with contentment is great gain. Seems counter intuitive? Isn't contentment the opposite of gain? However God does not measure gain by an earthly possession or goal; it is not defined by things you see. It is measured by things that cannot be seen – heavenly riches. God unlatches you from the chains of earthly pursuits; He frees you from that anchor of sin. The great gain is that God saves you from drowning. He sets you on a rock that will truly stand steady in the storms of life. If God has not spared His own Son, His beloved, most precious possession, will He not give you every thing needful for your body and life also? God is scripting your story in a way that ends in everlasting happiness. We need nothing more than food and clothing. Flee the pursuit of that which perishes that you might pursue an everlasting happiness.

## **2. Pursue the fight for lasting riches (vv.12-19)**

Verse 11 is a transition verse. It turns our focus from a pursuit of earthly happiness to a pursuit of something that will last. It leaves behind that perishing pile which weighed so heavily upon us in verses 7-10, to turn to something good; something free; a happiness that lasts. In a sense, verse 11 is a description of a daily contrition that we experience; a drowning of the old man, letting him be anchored and tossed into the waters of baptism – fleeing – and seeing a new man arise, a new woman, a child of God who takes possession of those gifts God has freely given – pursuing ...

*<sup>11</sup> But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.*

We often tell our kids not to fight. However, here is a fight we want to be engaged in. The good fight. We also sometimes warn our kids not to provoke a fight. However, here is a fight that we do want to provoke. The good fight. Here is a fight which Jesus fought; a confession that Jesus confessed. It is the good fight.

*<sup>12</sup> Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

It is a good fight because we fight for something good. We fight for something everlasting. And we do so without throwing one punch.

Jesus made this confession before Pilate without even saying a word. He fought this fight without even throwing a punch. He stood in nothing more than a few strips of cloth, bleeding, whipped, crowned with thorns, ordered about and mocked – the King of kings, the Lord of lords.

This king, this ruler of all Creation, would offer a silent confession, a fight that throws no punches. On that cross, He fled all the foolish pursuits of sinful man; He abandoned all riches and glory, and any happiness that this world could offer him; On that cross, He pursued the fight for your soul by becoming the payment for your sin.

the death of the cross is our Lord's dying confession. It is a martyrdom, a testimony, which declares that Christ did not love the world or the things in it; He loved you. He has carried your guilt, your greed, your foolish pursuits, and drowned them in the depths of the sea.

This God who gives life to all things gave life to His Son. The resurrection of Jesus is the living confession; that you are no longer dead in your sins and guilt, but alive in Him. It is a declaration of a new pursuit – everlasting happiness.

God gives life to all, God gives life to you; lay hold of this confession; lay hold of everlasting life. And so we confess the good confession before many: "I believe in Jesus Christ our Lord who suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; He descended into hell; The third day He was raised from the dead, He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there He will come to judge the living and the dead."

But don't reserve this confession to Sunday morning. This confession is more than words and this fight is more than an idea.

*<sup>17</sup> Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. <sup>18</sup> Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, <sup>19</sup> storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.*

You brought nothing in, you take nothing out. Naked you enter, naked you exit. Why cling to so many things in between?

See Lazarus. (Recall our Scripture reading from Luke 19). Maybe you have a chance to be rich. Unlike that rich man, you see Lazarus, the friend, the neighbor, the member in

need. Or maybe you are Lazarus. It seems you are always waiting for the bread crumbs to fall. Nothing ever seems to go your way. Either way, the pursuit is the same. Flee those things which perish and cling to the riches which last. Let go of those desires which drag you down in drowning; and set your feet on a good foundation.

It is ok to covet this story. This story of Lazarus truly belongs to you. For in the end, we are all empty handed beggars. All that God has put into our hands belongs to Him and is reserved for His good purpose. You are that poor beggar, having no works or power to offer God. Empty handed, yes, but rich beyond your wildest dreams.

For we hold to truths that are not self-evident – we have been endowed by our Creator with certain gifts of His grace in Christ – among them, Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of everlasting happiness. Let these be inscribed in the your mindset. Let these shape your pursuits. See yourself being carried off by God's angels to the riches of the resurrection at our Lord's appearing. This is the pursuit of everlasting happiness. Amen.