

First Timothy: The Household of God

The Gospel and Materialism – Part 1

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THE GOSPEL AND MATERIALISM – PART 1 **1 Timothy 6:3-10**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I'm going to invite you to open with me to 1 Timothy 6. Pull out those notes you received in your worship guide when you came in. We all have blind spots, right? Areas of our lives where we think we're right, but in reality, we're deceived. It's a simple picture, illustrated when you're driving. When you look in the mirror, it seems fine to change lanes and to begin to move over into the other lane, not knowing there is a car right next to you. They start to honk, you jerk back over into your lane and you wonder, "How could I miss something so obvious? They were right right next to me. I didn't see them." Blind spot.

Last week, we talked about one of the most glaring blind spots in American Christian history: slavery. Christians in the South gathering together for worship every Sunday, singing and studying the Bible, all the while using and abusing men, women and children as property, as slaves. They actually thought they were generous to give slaves an extra chicken at Christmas, Thanksgiving. It's scary to realize that good intentions, regular worship, even a weekly study of the Bible, don't all together prevent blindness in us. There's something in our sinful nature that instinctively chooses to see what we want to see and to ignore what we want to ignore, oftentimes until it's too late.

Blind spots are easy to see in hindsight but very difficult to see in the present. So, we thought about slavery last week, and we thought about how our brothers and sisters who have gone before us in communities like this totally missed it. Their example beckons us, I think, to ask the question, "Are there blind spots, then, in our lives today? Are there areas where God's Word is clear, but we're missing it?" I think there are.

Open Your Eyes...

See the urgent spiritual need in the world.

Open your eyes. This is not something new that we're talking about this morning, but this is where 1 Timothy 6, I believe, shines a spotlight on a blind spot in our lives, in our church, and in our culture, that we're prone to forget is there. Open your eyes and see the urgent spiritual need in the world.

6.8 billion people in the world. Most liberal estimates, putting the world at about one-third Christian, people in many cases who claim to be Christian more as a social or political identification, but even if we assumed all of those people were actually followers of Christ, that would leave over 4.5 billion people. 4.5 billion people in the world at this moment who are without Christ and on a road that leads to an eternal hell. Nearly two billion of those have no access to this gospel right now that we sing and we celebrate this morning...urgent spiritual need.

Example? I was talking to a guy this last week who lives in Behar, India, home to the poorest of the poor and some of the least evangelized people on the planet. So desolate! Physical suffering and massive spiritual poverty. Less than .01 percent evangelical. The death rate in this region in India is about 5,000 people per day, which means that every single day, about 4,950 plunge into an eternal hell. Most of them have never heard the gospel. So, see the urgent spiritual need in the world.

See the urgent physical need in the world.

Feel, for a minute, the urgent spiritual need in the world, and see the urgent physical need in the world. Today, over a billion people live and die in desperate poverty on less than a dollar per day. Close to two billion others are living on less than two dollars per day. That's nearly half the world, struggling to find food, water, shelter and medical care with the same amount of money you and I will spend on a fountain drink for lunch. Over 20,000 children will die today of either starvation or preventable disease today.

Specific example? Consider Somalia right now. Over 750,000 people in Somalia right now, today, on the verge of starvation at this moment, may not live through the next couple of months. Most of them without Christ. Poverty...and not only are they poor, but they are powerless. Impoverished millions living and dying in relative obscurity while we can comfortably ignore them in our affluence. We live...let's be honest...we live like they don't even exist. Open your eyes.

Realize the extravagant kingdom opportunity in the church.

Urgent spiritual need. Urgent physical need. See it. Feel it, and then realize the extravagant kingdom opportunity in the church. We, on the other hand, are rich. We're rich. You may not always feel rich, but you have water and food and clothes. If you make \$25,000 a year, you are in the top 10% of the world's wealthiest people. God has given us so much yet what are we doing with what He has given us? Christians in North America give an average of 2.5 percent of their income to the church which I think is probably a generous estimate, but we'll go with it...2.5% of income to the church. Then, churches in North America give an average of 2% of their money to needs around the world, to missions overseas. So, you put it together, that means that out of every \$100 a North American Christian makes, we give five cents to the rest of the world. Five cents! That's kind of like an extra chicken for the slaves at Christmas or Thanksgiving.

I wonder if followers of Christ a hundred years from now...if Christ hasn't come back...if followers of Christ a hundred years from now will look back at Christians in America today and ask, "How could they live in such affluence while millions were dying of starvation? Many of whom had never even heard of Christ? How could they fill their churches with more things and more programs and more comforts for their own kids and their own churches while their brothers and sisters on the other side of the world were dying of malnourished bodies and deformed brains? How could they live like four billion didn't even exist? What would have happened if they would have realized all that God had given them? What could they have been a part of in the world if they had truly, whole-heartedly, unashamedly, counter-culturally given their lives and their families and their possessions for the spread of the gospel and the glory of God in a world of urgent spiritual and physical need?"

Oh, that's where I want to be. That's where I want to lead my family, and I want to be part of leading this church to experience the extravagant kingdom opportunity God has given us for His glory in the world, no matter what it costs us, and I want us to be there for two reasons.

One, because I'm convinced by God's Word that when we give extravagantly of our lives and when we give extravagantly of our possessions, we will not only lead other people to live spiritually and to live physically, but we will personally discover where true joy and delight are found. Joy and delight that will never, ever, ever end. The second reason I want us to experience this extravagant kingdom opportunity is because if we don't give our lives extravagantly and give our possessions extravagantly for His glory in the world, then people will continue to die spiritually and die physically. If we don't give extravagantly of our lives and our possessions, then we will personally find ourselves on a road that leads to ruin and destruction. Destruction that will never, ever, ever end. Let me show it to you in God's Word...1 Timothy 6.

Now, here's the deal. I start here with statistics, lifting your eyes to the world, because we need to realize, as we sit here looking at this Word here this morning, that the world doesn't look like this, right? We need to be reminded of that. There's more Christians sitting in this section right over here...this front section to my...there's more Christians sitting in this section than there are in all of northern Yemen. We need to realize that when we see Yemen in the news this week, there's more Christians right here than in all of northern Yemen. Eight million people in the northern part of Yemen; there's more Christians right here. So, we need to realize what God has given us here. Physically, obviously, what God has given us, the reality that if what was happening around the world among children was happening in our community, every child in our community under 18 would be gone by Tuesday. So, we need to see the world, but even more important than that, we need to see the Word. We need to see the Word because we need to see how the Word fights materialism, not with statistics or with stories, but with the truth of Christ. This is key because statistics and stories, though they are helpful, statistics and stories will not change us. Christ alone will change us, and I pray that He will, from the inside out.

Watch Your Hearts

So, open your eyes and watch your hearts. 1 Timothy 6:3-10:

"If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."

Okay, so Paul here is continuing to address Timothy concerning false teachers in Ephesus, and you'll notice that he uses the word "craving" two times in negative ways. You might circle them. First in verse four. Verse four, he says, "The false teacher *has an unhealthy craving* [circle it there] *for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction...*" So that's verse four...unhealthy

craving. You get down to verse ten, "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving [circle it there] that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.*" So, based upon these two unhealthy cravings, these two unhealthy desires that Paul addresses here, I want to encourage us to watch our hearts in two ways.

Don't crave spiritual division.

One, the Bible says don't crave spiritual division. So, Paul's addressing here people who are teaching different doctrines leading to church division, and he cautions us, saying false teachers are fueled by ignorance and arrogance. Verse four, the false teacher, puffed up with conceit, and he understands nothing. He is arrogant and ignorant. Not a good combination. He is arrogant because he sets up his teaching as superior to God's Word, and he is ignorant because his teaching is not true. False teachers, Paul says, are fueled by ignorance and arrogance and such teaching results in controversy and strife. Controversy in the church and strife among Christians. Paul lists five different effects of these false teachers in the church: "*envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction,*" all leading to ungodly minds and ungodly lives.

So, in these first couple of verses, Paul is urging Timothy, just like we saw him do in chapter one, with a simple exhortation, be content in the gospel. Hold fast, he says in verse three, to "*the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness.*" Paul says, "There's no need to graduate beyond something else. Stay here. Spend your life here. Saturate the church here in the gospel of Jesus Christ...His life, His death, His resurrection, His commands, His teachings, His Word. Hold fast to the gospel of Christ, and this gospel," Paul says, "will produce godly lives and godly minds. There's no need to crave anything else. Be content in the gospel."

So, that's Paul's first caution and exhortation, and it leads directly into the second. See the relationship here between what these false teachers were teaching and how these false teachers were living. Verse five, talking about "*constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.*" The word there for "gain" is loaded with financial implications. Godliness, a means of financial gain. People, these false teachers, thinking and teaching that God is a means to financial gain. Living for God, and God plus financial gain. It is the first century version of health/wealth/prosperity gospel, and a first century mirror into our own hearts. Living for God plus stuff. God, even as a means to financial gain.

Don't crave material possession.

So, Paul warns us about a second craving, a dangerous destructive craving. He and the Bible say clearly, "Don't crave material possessions. Don't crave material possession."

Now, I want to be clear here. Just as Paul is clear later in this passage in verse 17, that God "*richly provides us with everything to enjoy.*" In other words, things, possessions are not bad in and of themselves. We'll talk more about that next week. God richly gives good things to enjoy. So money, possessions...not in and of themselves bad. In verse ten, Paul does not say, "money is a root of all kinds of evils." What does he say? He says, "*The love of money is a root of all kinds of evils.*" He doesn't say riches are bad. He says the desire for riches, craving for money; desire for possessions; desire for things; wanting the next gadget; desiring the nicer house, the better clothes; wanting more. Paul says, "Don't crave material possession."

So, this is the caution. Very, very similar to what you remember...we don't have time to turn there but remember what Jesus said in Matthew 6:17-21, when He said, "*Do not lay up*

for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

That is a scary statement. Do you hear that? Where your money is, is where your heart is. Your money...so, hear this...your money is an indicator of your heart. That's a frightening reality in this culture, isn't it? Your checkbook reflects your heart. How much of your money is in your stuff shows how much your heart is in your stuff. You say, "Well, I don't have a love for money." The Bible beckons you to look...obviously, you don't want to say you have love for money. I don't want to say I have a love for money, but when I look at where I spend my money, I'm showing where my heart is. Where we put our financial resources. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

What Jesus says in Matthew 6, what Paul is saying in 1 Timothy 6, is so strange to us because we are so programmed to always think of money as a blessing, and it is a blessing. Money is a blessing in many, many, many good ways. However, Scripture, the Word of God, teaches us that money can also be a barrier...a significant barrier in your relationship with God and a barrier to your experiencing eternal life. Paul knows this, so he gives us three cautions when it comes to materialism. Oh, God give us grace to hear, believe and heed these cautions. We are a materialistic people. I am a materialistic person. We forget these things. I have forgotten these things. This week has been penetrating in the study so listen, listen. Brothers and sisters, in a very...we're engulfed in a materialistic world. Listen to this.

Materialism is deceptive. It's deceptive. Now, we're going to come back to Paul's exhortation in a minute but listen to the warning language here. Look at verse nine: "*those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare...*" It's a trap, Paul says. Materialism, desire for things, money, possessions, bigger, better...it's a trap; it's a snare. Materialism is like drinking seawater. You're thirsty. There's water there...a lot of it in the sea. So, I'm going to drink some of it. Seawater, because it has such a high concentration of salt, the more you drink the more thirsty you become and your body needs pure water. You don't think, "Well, this would be bad." You just drink it. You drink it. You think it's water...it will be good for me, and you drink it, but the more you do, the sooner you dehydrate. If you keep drinking it, you'll get headaches and dry mouth and low blood pressure, then a rapid heart rate and, eventually, you'll become delirious, go unconscious and if you keep drinking it, you will die. It's amazing. You see water, and you think, "That's what I want." However, as you drink it, unbeknownst to you, you are killing your body.

That's money and possessions. You see it, and you think, "I want it." However, you don't realize it's a snare and the more you indulge in it, the more you kill your soul. Materialism...a love of things, money, possessions...is deceptive.

Materialism is dangerous. It leads you, Paul says, into many senseless and harmful desires. Materialism sets you down a road, a path that is wrought with danger. Consider where materialism, the desire for things, leads you. The list is long, and it's breathtaking. It could go on and on: selfishness, cheating, fraud, perjury, robbery, envy, quarrelling, hatred, violence, murder. How many marital difficulties revolve around money? Pornography is driven by it. Blackmail. Exploitation of the weak. Oppression of the poor. Immorality. Injustice. Materialism is a breeding ground for thousands and thousands of other sins. Are you and I foolish enough to think we are immune to these things?

Here, see the warnings all over Scripture. Remember Joshua 7? Achan sees possessions. Just a few that he wants to keep from the plunder of war, and so he keeps them and he

hides them. He and his entire family end up dying as a result. King Solomon ruined, as well as all kinds of other Old Testament kings, by desire for money, possessions. Ruined. It's not just Old Testament; it's New Testament. Jesus is saying in Matthew 10 that it's hard for rich people to enter the kingdom of God. It's hard. Jesus said in Luke 6, "*But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.*" It's James in James 5: "*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days.*" You lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.

Now, it's all over Scripture. Materialism is dangerous. Not just now but forever. Materialism is deception, materialism is dangerous, and materialism is damning. I hesitated to use that word for a variety of reasons, and I apologize for some younger ones in our midst who are having to take notes and write that word down, but we need to see this. People "*who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.*" That is serious. That's extremely serious. That's just from the desire for riches. What about those who already have it and whose hearts are already tied up in their riches? Materialism plunges you...plunges you, me...into ruin and destruction. The word literally means plunge...you sink, you're dragged down, submersed to the bottom and drowned. Love for things...desire for more...will drown you forever.

We know we're talking about eternity, both based on verse seven where Paul talked about how you're not going to take anything out of this world, i.e. when this life is over, it will not matter a thing how much stuff you had. With all due respect, Steve Jobs and his family with great sensitivity to their loss, his life is yet another reminder for us that no matter how many billions someone is worth, they take none of that into eternity. Possessions will always let you down at the most important moment of your life when you enter into death. They will have nothing for you there. That's why Paul says later in verse 12 and verse 19, take hold of eternal life in contrast to eternal death.

So hear this. The Bible is talking like this. I am, as your pastor, am talking like this, not just because there are major needs around the world. The Bible is talking like this, and I'm talking like this in our culture and in this room because I am concerned for your souls. I'm not being over dramatic in saying that how you handle money will, literally, make or break you forever. It kills. It destroys. It's dangerous and damning. You put your heart into things and stuff and possessions and wealth of this community, it will destroy you and the whole time you will think that you are okay. So, I want to call you to run. To run from anything close to the love of money. Run from the love of money to the love of God and this is the exhortation. So materialism...deceptive, dangerous, damning.

The exhortation: Be content in God! Be content in God. Godliness with contentment is gain. Great gain! Oh, that's a good phrase. Paul writes gain. I can almost picture him writing. "No. It's not just gain. It's great gain." Paul doesn't say, "Christian, stop living for gain. Be miserable." He says, "Christians, start living for real gain. He is gain. Live," Paul says, "for real profit. Profit in God. Don't settle for the love of money. Be satisfied in the love of God."

That's a very different way to live in this culture. It says "*godliness with contentment.*" Not godliness with craving for something else but godliness with rest, joy and delight and contentment in God. For in God, you are free from craving more stuff in this world. You have God. Isn't that what Paul said in Philippians 4? "I found the secret of being content, whether I have much or little." This is the secret: "*I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*" It doesn't matter what I have. I have Christ; I have everything I want,

everything I need. He says in Philippians 4:19, *"My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* Why do you need to live for riches in Birmingham, Christian, when you have riches and glories in Christ Jesus? It makes no sense. When you believe that God is gain, then you live very differently in the world. You live simply. This is Paul's exhortation. Verse eight: *"If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content."* Food and clothing. Paul says the basics. That's all. The necessities are covered. Christians, Paul says, can and ought to be content with the simple necessities of life. In a culture of accumulation, built on having more and more and more, always consuming, always looking for the next deal, watching out for the next deal, we say, "We don't need more, and we don't want more."

Don't miss this. Think about this. Does God love you? Yes. Is God committed to providing for you? Yes. So, when we see things like this in the Bible, these things are not written to make us miserable. They are written to make us happy. God wants us happy, and He knows that our happiness is found in Him. So, He calls us away from stuff because it won't make us happy; that's deceptive, dangerous, damning. He is delightful. Do we believe Him? Do we really believe Him? Do we really trust that He is our contentment? If so, then we will go against the grain in this culture, in this community. I'm not saying this is easy.

So, do you have an iPhone? Not addressed in 1 Timothy 6. Probably not on the same level as food and clothing. Does that mean an iPhone is bad? I don't know. There's no...there's no...in no way some legalistic measure here. If there were, then we would miss the whole point. You say, "Okay, I want to check off that box." The whole point is for you to look at your heart this morning. To look at your heart every day and say, "Christ, I want you to be my contentment; my satisfaction." When you have a desire for stuff, for more, say, "Christ, you're my sufficiency. You're my satisfaction. Is there is a better way that I could use the resources you can give me? Or is this wise? Is this good?"

You know, the best kind of guide that I've ever read, just in a short statement, actually, came from Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle produced by the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelicalism thirty years ago. It said,

"We resolve to renounce waste and to oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings. We also accept the distinction between necessities and luxuries, creative hobbies and empty status symbols, modesty and vanity, occasional celebrations and normal routine, and between the service of God and slavery to fashion. Where to draw the line requires conscientious thought and decision by us together with members of our family."

I would even say in the sense in the members of our faith family that we as a church want to help one another out in these areas. I do want to call us, based on the authority of God's Word, to live very differently in this culture and this community. To live simply. To live content with necessities. To forsake luxuries because you are content in God. Live simply.

Give sacrificially. We'll hit on this more next week. When you get to verses 17-19, listen to what Paul says:

"As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a

good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life."

Live simply, and then give sacrificially for the glory of Christ in a world of urgent spiritual and physical need. This is the practical takeaway from 1 Timothy 6 for us and our lives, our families in this church. This is why we encourage one another as a church, instead of thinking about more and more and more stuff for ourselves and this church, for the last couple of years to limit our budget, to establish a line..."Okay, contentment as low as we can, so we can free up as much as possible. So, we can make sacrifices for the glory of Christ in a world of urgent spiritual and physical need." That's led us to do things different, and it's not always been easy; sometimes it's been difficult, but it's worth it. To guard our hearts. To give for the glory of Christ. To do that in our families. For us to say, "Okay, in our families, in a culture where more and more and more...you make more, therefore, you raise your standard of living. Just say no. No, we're going to be content. We're going to establish that line of contentment." Again, not saying exactly what that looks like. We're going to free ourselves up to give sacrificially and generously, everything above that line. We're not going to...we're not going to see godliness as a means to financial gain but godliness as a motivation for sacrificial giving.

Just a side note here that crossed my mind when I was studying through this and really investigating my own heart. I've had people accuse me of writing a book or a couple of books about being radical only to profit myself. "Must be nice to live out the American dream while writing against the American dream." I just want to assure you, brothers and sisters, that every single dime that is coming in from those books is being gladly given away for the glory of Christ in the nations. I want you to know that. In similar ways that Paul in the New Testament would say, "I want you to know what's going on financially here because I don't want to be accused of peddling the gospel." I never want to be accused of peddling the gospel, using the gospel of God for financial gain. I want you to know that's all being given away and there's deep joy in giving for the glory of Christ.

So, live simply. Paul says give sacrificially, and thrive eternally. Be rich in good works, be generous and willing to share and, in the process, you're "storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life," Paul says.

Live simply. Give sacrificially. Thrive eternally. You remember this picture. Remember John Wesley? We've talked about it. We talked about this just a couple years ago...just a reminder. In 1731, Wesley began to limit his expenses so he would have more money to give to the poor. So, one year, his income was 30 pounds and his living expenses were 28. So, he had two pounds to give away. The next year his income doubled, but he still lived on 28 pounds and gave 32 pounds away. Third year, his income jumped to 90 pounds, again he lived on 28 so he gave 62 pounds away. Fourth year, made 120 pounds, gave 92 pounds to the poor. Wesley preached that Christians should not merely tithe but give away all extra income once the family and creditors were taken care of. He believed that with increasing income, that Christian's standard of giving should increase not his standard of living. He began this practice at Oxford and continued it throughout his life. Even when his income rose to thousands of pounds, he lived simply and quickly gave his surplus money away. One year his income was slightly over 1,400 pounds; he gave away all but 30. He was afraid of laying up treasures on earth so the money went out as quickly as it came in. When he died in 1791, the only money mentioned in his will was the miscellaneous coins that would be found in his pockets and dresser drawers. That's all he had in his will. Most of the 30,000 other pounds he had earned in his lifetime he had given away. You put that in today's

wages, at one point he was making \$160,000 a year, but he was living like he was making \$20,000 a year. That's weird.

Why do you live like that? You live like that because godliness with contentment is gain. People scoff at that idea but what if...what if God gives you more, not to increase your standard of living, but to increase your standard of giving. What if we were strategic and living simply and giving sacrificially like that? Could this community of faith rise above and be free from the deadly danger of material possessions that once blinded us and could we be a part of spreading the gospel amidst urgent spiritual and physical need in the world?

People say, "You have to be careful here. Don't go too extreme. What if people start selling all their stuff and start neglecting all the family's material needs?" Look around brothers and sisters. We are not in danger of doing this. When we get there, we will address this. The Word will keep us from there but let us not be too concerned. Do you really think we're going to stand before Christ and one day hear Him say, "I have this against you. You gave too much for my glory. You should have kept more for yourself instead."

Jesus never called someone a fool for giving too much and keeping too little. He did call someone a fool for keeping too much and giving too little. It's worth it. It's worth it so let me encourage you from a conversation I had this last week with this brother who lives in Behar, India. So, as a church, it's what we said...we want to bring our spending on ourselves down, free up as much as possible to give ourselves away. There's been criticism on different levels for that...taking Goldfish away from kids, this or that, but I'm talking with this brother last week in Behar, India. Again, the poorest of the poor. Less than 0.01 percent evangelical Christians; close to 5,000 people plunging every day into an eternal hell. So, as a result of...just a small part of that "Radical Experiment," we partnered together with brothers and sisters, the few that there are in this area, and doing training and disciple making for them.

I think I've told you the story about how one pastor, Rajesh, went to this training. Was at the end of his rope; was just totally down, ready to give up, throw in the rope. As we went to this training that we're partnering together with on disciple making...at this training, he's encouraged to find a village that's in need of the gospel, that has no knowledge of the gospel. Going to that village, when you walk in, find the first person you meet and say to them, "I'm here in the name of Jesus, and I would like to pray for the people in this village." Rajesh thought it was crazy, never work. He said, "I don't have anything else though, so I'll go." He walks into the village, first guy he sees, "Hi, I'm here in the name of Jesus. I'd like to pray for this village." This guy says, "Who's Jesus? I'd like to hear more about Him?" Rajesh says, "You would?" He says, "Yes, but wait. Let me get some other people to hear as well." So, Rajesh follows this guy back to his home and this guy pulls together friends and family. Long story short, within a couple of weeks, 25 people in this village had trusted in Christ for their salvation.

So, I'd heard that much. This brother that I'm talking to from Behar this last week tells me that since that day, that group of believers has gone out doing the same things. They're tracking this...it's not just okay, numbers for the sake of numbers. They're tracking this. Tracking health in these churches. From that one village has now been planted 147 different churches.

This is worth it, brothers and sisters. To make small sacrifices here. Great fruit. Not just around the world but in our lives. This is good isn't it? This is joy. This is delight. Like, when you face death, you will not take your possessions with you, but we will take brothers and sisters from Behar, India with us, and brothers and sisters all around the world are with us.

We've come alongside in their physical suffering, and we've come alongside in spiritual poverty with no knowledge of the gospel. It's worth it. It's worth it to live very differently in this culture and do church very differently in this culture. Living simply. Giving sacrificially. Thriving eternally.

Give Your Lives

Proclaiming the gospel as good!

So, let's give our lives. Two things: Proclaiming this gospel as good! This gospel is too good. We want to give our lives and our possessions to make it known. This is good news! 2 Corinthians 8:9, God in Christ, *"though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich."* The Bible describes the Incarnation in language of riches and poverty. Christ becoming poor, taking our sin upon Himself, so that we might have the righteousness of Christ. To say to every person in the world...every people group on the planet...there's good news. There's infinitely good news. God has come. So, you were starving; you were starving spiritually, physically. God has come. He loves you. He cares for you. He has become poor, so that you might become rich in Him, so that you might know Him now and forever. We, as His people, are here to tell you that He loves you, and He cares for you. To do this in Birmingham, to do this to the ends of the earth and everywhere in between, let's live, proclaiming this gospel is good.

Let me ask you a question. Can a materialistic world be won to Christ by a materialistic church? I don't think so. Because, number one, we will not show...as long as we are materialistic church, we will not show that Christ is all-satisfying. We will show the world that Christ plus stuff is satisfying and that is not the gospel. How will we lead people to abandon the things of this world if we fill His church with the things of this world? Is His Word sufficient for us? See our brothers and sisters around the world gathering together, late at night, in secret for hours at a time, not because the new band and sound system is great and the transitions are smooth. They gather together because they want the Word. They want to know God, and God is not a means of financial gain for them. May He not be for us.

Second reason why I don't believe a materialistic world will be reached by a materialistic church is because the resources needed to win the world for Christ will be kept in all of our second homes and our nicer possessions, and we'll continue to give our pennies to the Great Commission. Ralph Winters said, "Obedience to the Great Commission has more consistently been poisoned by affluence than by anything else." So, let's give our lives and our possessions, proclaiming this gospel is good and living like God is gain.

Living like God is gain!

Let's live like God is gain! This is the whole point of communion. That Christ has become poor, He has shed His blood, given His body for us, so that we might be reconciled to God. So that you and I...I was walking in this morning...early this morning...just looking up at the sky and seeing the glory of creation. The sky and the clouds and the formation and knowing that God was holding every single one of those clouds by His hand in place, and He was directing them. At the same time, He was listening to me as I was praising Him for it. I just began to think, we have God. Why do we need more stuff in the world? Let's put our hearts in God and not more stuff in the world. Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. So, by His Spirit and by His grace, let's look at where our treasure is, where our hearts are. Let's say, "How can we be loosed from the stuff of this world and put our hearts

more in God and His work in the world?" In the process, experience the delight of God in the gospel and spread the glory of God in the gospel.

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