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January 1, 2012



INVEST IN THE KINGDOM

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This day we are looking at two powerful passages. The first is in the 28th chapter of the book of Genesis beginning with the tenth verse. Now Jacob has stolen his brother's birthright through chicanery; has captured his brother's blessing and his brother Esau has become very angry. Jacob knows that it is time for him to escape. And so Jacob begins his journey away from his home and the very first evening is what we have today.

Genesis 28:10- 22

Jacob left Beer-Sheba and went towards Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the LORD stood beside him and said, 'I am the LORD, the God of Abraham

your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring.

Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!’ And he was afraid, and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’

So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you.’

Now our New Testament lesson from the first letter to Timothy, the sixth chapter the sixth to the tenth verse then we will jump down to the 17th verse. Listen again for the word of our Lord.

Timothy 6:6-10, 17

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

This Sunday is Family Sunday. It is a time when families come and worship with us together. We are all together. It is a rich, rich time for us when we do it. We do it relatively regularly and I was considering it in my prayer and reflection not long ago. The gift of families is one of the great blessings in our congregation.

We have a large number of young families and beautiful young children. It is just a real gift. As I think about that theologically it seems to be from a theological perspective that children really equal hope. There is something about us; we might say that we are future generation people. Meaning that we are a people who live into the promise; not only for us but for the generations to come.

I think about that with Abraham and Sarah. They had the gift of a child at an unexpected time and in a rather unexpected way. That child was a gift for them but even more so that child was a fulfillment of a promise for future generations; or the opening of a promise for future generations. I think about David. King David who had a heart that sought after God. Even after his sins he would seek to have a clean heart.

He desired to do great things for God. And one of the great things that David wanted to do for God, one of his ambitions as he grew in his faith was to be able to build the temple, a place for God. And you will recall that God said no, no; it is not for you to do. It is not for you to do; it is actually after you, for your son to do. And so Solomon built the first temple. It is not just our own biological children but it is really about, I think about Moses. Moses, if there ever was a servant leader, Moses was the identity. He was the servant

leader of all. And yet he never was allowed to enter into the Promised Land. He never could taste the fruit of the land of milk and honey and plenty. It comes for future generations. It came after his death.

I think about Paul although we don't really know about Paul and his life. We know where he came from. We know a little bit his education. We know about some experiences that he had but we don't know a lot about Paul, about married life. We don't know about biological children. But one thing we do know about Paul is that he had a love for the future generations. And you see that brought out in a beautiful way in his letters to Timothy.

That is why I love to read those letters to Timothy. You can see the love. He is not just a spiritual mentor for Timothy, the young man that he is, but Paul is viewing him as a spiritual son. Paul is claiming that role as the spiritual parent. He is preparing him and that is what is happening in his letters to Timothy. Paul is preparing him for a future ministry that will continue long after Paul's. So, I think that there is something for children and adults in these letters.

Every time we see children, we want to invest in them because we see them as the definition of hope. It is why we put so much energy, money, and time into them. Think about that for those of you who are here who have children that are college age or approaching college age. Think about that money. And think about what you could be doing if you hadn't spent that money.

But you are doing it not just to do that; you are doing that because there is something in you that says this child, this generation might be the hope of the world. It might be the promise of something. You see what happens really is that this idea of children as hope is one generation's way of detaching. I use the word detaching in a positive way; in a way that I think is of great value. But it is one generation saying that it is not all about us. We found out very quickly that we

didn't have all the answers. Maybe things are better in some ways maybe they are not in other ways but one thing we do know for sure is that we don't know.

We hadn't been able to figure it out; we hadn't been able to get it done and we haven't been able to accomplish it. And so it's a way, in a sense, for us to be detached and to say that we will leave that for another generation. We will seek to prepare them but we will leave that for them. That hope, that future hope and promise, will come in and through them. Detachment is a critical Christian concept. It is not just about how we raise our children or how we think about one generation passing on the gauntlet to another generation. But truly the whole sense of our life you see, as Christians, we are called to be in the world, but not of it.

We are called, as Christians, to be in the world, to experience the world, to be part of it, to be engaged in it, to be engaged in commerce, and to be engaged in entertainment, engaged in all those things. But, we are not to be defined by that; to be detached in a sense. We have a deeper understanding of our reality, not to be measured by the world's standards; not to be measured by the way the secular world might look at it. But, to simply be detached enough to say I'm in the world but I'm not of it. It's not all of me; it's not going to define me.

And Paul is doing that with Timothy in a beautiful way. Timothy is living in a time that is very similar to ours. He is really wrestling with the world that is increasingly moving away – even if you take faith out of it. If you take our faith out of it; just consider for a minute. Think about all of the great philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, that we know and still study and read. Plato, Aristotle, stop at those two. Those are two of the great ones. They weren't Roman, they were Greeks. The Greek world had a deep desire for knowledge, for wisdom. What happened over time though was that when the Roman world came to them they had some sort of minor

philosophers and minor thinking but ultimately the Roman world came to be identified by power, the Pax Romana, the Roman peace was a peace that was bought by brutality.

Peace was bought by order, structure, and governance. And so, Timothy is living in a time when the world has shifted from the deeper understandings of wisdom and the pursuit of wisdom to a larger understanding of a sort of material order. I believe that control and power is increasingly shaping our world. I am going to wax political, just for a moment. I was up early this morning. I did go to bed and I wasn't up all night, but I was up early this morning.

I was watching television, but I don't know what channel it was. They were showing commercials that were airing in Iowa with the primary going on there. One of the commercials is a negative ad and it finds one or two of the politicians who are running for President who said, "I was wrong, I was mistaken". And they had a loop of this ad that just repeated over and over, "I was wrong, I was mistaken, I was wrong, I was mistaken, I was wrong, I was mistaken". And then the tag line of it was: "who would want somebody like that as a President?"

Well, I have to be honest with you, if we want somebody to lead us who was never wrong or mistaken, they are so boring that I wouldn't let them lead me. I mean the truth is life is made by mistakes. If you haven't failed at something you have never succeeded at anything. Where in the world did we start to get this nonsense? That is not a political statement at all, that is just stupidity, in my mind. Here is the idea for me; you see we've lived in this world that moved away from the understanding of growth and changing our ideas. If I believed what I believed when I was 18 or 19 years old, you would be crazy to let me stand up here before you. You are still kind of crazy for letting me do it. We change and we move, but you see what is happening is that the world is increasingly saying, "No, no, no, you are identified

by the past experience". You are identified because we are living increasingly in this world that is just ordered in that way.

We are also living in a world that is increasingly defined by getting rich quick and losing it even more quickly. And so it was in the time of Timothy and Paul with the way commerce was being played out, and the way the world was being shifted, and the way the world was being opened up. What is happening is that Paul is looking at Timothy and he is realizing, as we realize, that we see this world as being very, very similar. It is not an ancient world and there is no application.

Paul looks at Timothy and in the sixth chapter, the sixth verse he says there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment. And what he wants to ultimately say to Timothy is, Timothy, somewhere along the line you have to learn to be content with what you have. Now I asked you to define it earlier, all your definitions are great. Let me tell you what the Bible says contentment is. The word used usually translated for contentment is a Greek word *autarkeia* and it means sufficiency. It can mean enough in some contexts. But in the context that it is used in Scripture it almost always means this: the word *autarkeia* means a detachment from externals.

A detachment from externals, meaning that contentment is something that's interior to the soul. I will give you two other examples in Paul's letters. Second Corinthians chapter 12, verse ten: now this is after Paul has talked about the thorn in his side and he has talked about all these sufferings that he has experienced and then he says this so I will boast all the more, more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ might dwell in me therefore I am content with weaknesses, insult, hardships, persecutions and calamities for the sake of Christ for whenever I am weak then I am strong. An interior understanding, I'll be content in the midst of all the world has because it is for the sake of Christ.

And then the book that just rocks me every time I open it up is Philippians, chapter four. Beginning with verse ten, "I rejoice in the Lord greatly, now at last you have revived your concern for me." They were concerned about him and Paul's acknowledging that. "Indeed you were concerned for me, but you had no opportunity to show it. Not that I'm referring to being in need for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know that if it is to have little and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well fed and going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case it was kind of you to share my distress" (Phil 4: 10-14).

I mean what Paul is saying is this is that it is a detachment from the externals. Katie Macmillan and I will agree on this, we agree on most things. Katie is one of the dear saints in my life. Katie and I will agree that one of the top ten best books of the twentieth century is a book by Viktor Frankl called *Man's Search for Meaning*. Viktor Frankl was a Holocaust survivor. He was very much a professional as he went in. He was a Holocaust survivor; he survived the concentration camps and when he was done he began to reflect on that experience.

He began to look at the people that not only survived, but the people that seemed to have a sense of joy or contentment in their life while they were in the midst of overwhelming suffering and pain and anguish and humiliation and abuse. What Frankl realized was that it had very little to do with the material, or even the physical; it had very little to do with the health which they had when they entered and with how healthy they stayed in the midst of it. It really had almost everything to do with those who were able to be detached from the externals; to be able to celebrate beauty. To see a lone rose in the midst of a field of snow, or to be able to see something beautiful even in the arc of a building is to be able to find something that was within them. The power and the presence of something that

was deep, or that held something of a deeper meaning. Now, we all get this. I would encourage you to read Viktor Frankl. I think it is still a classic. We all get this but here is the problem we have because we get confused.

We get into what I called the Monopoly syndrome. I have a Monopoly game here today and here is the thing with the Monopoly game, it is a fun game. It can take a long time to play, as you know. Here is the point: you play Monopoly, and it is a fun game for awhile.

All the games we play are fun. And we know it is a game and we know it is not real money. We understand that, but here is the point: once you get in it, sometimes the longer you are in it, the more real it starts to get and the more competitive you become. If you are competitive like the Gates family for example or like the Wood family, it can become a knockdown drag-out. You still know it's a game, but you get caught up in it. You get drawn into it and it starts to feel real.

When I was a little kid, my Uncle Charlie would come and visit. My Uncle Charlie was a wonderful man in a lot of ways but he was sadistic in this way. He used to love to get me upset and then he would watch me just spiral out of control as a little kid. He knew that he could do it by playing a game with me and if he beat me in the game enough I would just lose control and become so angry and start throwing stuff. It is a game, but it starts to feel like more than a game. You know John Ortberg is right, that at the end of the game, all the pieces go back in the box, even the broken ones; they all go back in the box. We get it, but the games start to become too real or they feel too real. So detachment is not just enough. It is only a game. It is really not just enough because then it seems like more than that. It is not only detachment but it is reattachment.

And that is why the apostle Paul, a 110 times in his writings, says “in Christ.” What he is saying is it is not enough just to be kind of like an Ayn Rand detached or to be a stoic kind of detached. But it is about being detached and reattached in Christ. Being reattached to something that then defines everything for your life; because it is not enough to know it is just a game because the more you are in it the more you it just starts to seem real; the more it starts just to become this living reality for me.

The measurement of success or the measurement of my worth is the measurement of my value. I see it in the church, too. Lord knows, pastors we are so guilty of this. We have what we call steeple envy. How big is your church? How many people do you have coming? It is unbelievable. Anytime you ask somebody how many people come to your church (your attendance) you always know that it is going to be at least double. Even if they are honest it is going to be double because there really is no honesty in ministry in that regard. It is just bizarre. It is just a game.

So, it is not just being detached it is being reattached. It is being reattached in Christ. And that is where our money becomes so important. That is why the Bible talks about it. Jesus talked more about money than perhaps any other topic in Scripture. Why? Because, he knew that it was that measurement for us but he also knew that it was one of the great places for us to come to know the power and generosity of God.

To realize that the gifts that God gave us as our associate pastor was saying with our kids earlier today; they get an allowance. We get an allowance, too. It comes from God; it is all his. It is what we do with it. And it is that kind of life of generosity that matters. And so our identity is not about the money that we hold but what we do with it; how we live into it; the honor that we have with it.

My dad was in his mid 50's or so when I was born. If my dad was still alive on December the 28th he would have been 106 years old. If you know me you know a lot about my dad. My dad had about a two week education; he was in school for literally about two weeks as a kid. He was literally sold with a bill of sale to someone. My dad had a rough life but I think this is right. I don't think my dad ever in his entire life made more than \$6000 in any given year.

He didn't have a lot but there was one thing my dad pounded into me. He said, "Son, you know it doesn't matter what you have or what you don't have. The one thing that matters is your name. It is your name. Your name is all that you have." So if you shake someone's hand and you make a promise to them, you better keep it because you cannot lose your name. That is the one thing you have. And for all of the events in my dad's life, that is the one thing I can tell you, with full clarity, is that I never once saw my dad forfeit his name.

And the thing that was so amazing to me is that my dad knew that his name was not just his name. It wasn't the name that someone gave him. It wasn't his birth name. He knew that his name was the name of his father and mother. He knew that name was the name of his ancestors. And my dad, even in the simplicity of his life, also realized that his name was important because he taught it to me. He knew that his name would be the name of his descendants, as well. I think about all the sins in my life, the ones for which I feel the most guilty, are those times when I've shaken hands and haven't been able to keep my promise.

And the reminder of the fidelity and faithfulness of my dad to realize that there is something deeper. There is something of greater value. A couple of years ago I was at a local bank on December the 30th, and there was father and a son, who are members of our church. The son was in elementary school and they were up in front of me. The father

who I knew well didn't really seem to make a lot of contact with me so I figured it is a personal, private thing.

I was just standing there, but finally after standing there for awhile waiting in line, the son, elementary school kid, a precocious kid, said, "Hi, Pastor Jim. I said, " Hi." He said, "Do you know why we are here?" I said, "No, why?" He said, "Well, we are here because we made a pledge at the church and my daddy says it has been a hard year and he got behind and the only way he can make that pledge is to come and take some of his retirement money from the bank and give it to the church.

The father, who I knew dearly, who I loved dearly, when his son said that, he put his head down and he looked humiliated. But I have to tell you that the look of pride on that little boy's face as he looked at what his father was doing in faithfulness, will never, ever escape my mind. And that had absolutely nothing to do about money. It had everything to do about faithfulness and honor and integrity.

Jim Elliot lived to be 29 years old. He was a Wheaton grad, 50 some years ago. He and a group of other families moved to Ecuador to evangelize to the Waodani people. They were an unreached group, unreached tribe. They had never encountered Christ. They thought and they prayed. They worked; they flew in to share something of the gospel of Jesus Christ with this tribe. Five young missionaries were murdered by the Waodani people.

One of the most famous lines for me of the twentieth century is one sentence from Jim Elliot, who was one of the martyrs, one of the young men, 29 years old, a father and husband. "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose." I have that handwritten sentence in my wallet. "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose." One of the most amazing things about that story is that their families came back and right now that tribe is a tribe of Christ.

The truth is that life is not just in the game of Monopoly. It is the same thing for you and for me in our lives. At the end of the game, at the end of the day, we all go into the box, too. I've never met one man or woman ever, who on their deathbed and who has looked at me and said, "Jim, I regret that I didn't spend more time at the office." I've never once, ever, in my entire life, been with anyone in those last throes of life, as they consider what the significance and the meaning of life is and said, "Jim, I just wish I had made a little bit more. I would have done a little bit more. I wished I'd had a little bit more." When we get to that point we know what really matters. Everything else is washed away.

We know that it is about relationship. It is about love and we know that it is ultimately about Christ. It is about his promise and about his grace. So what if we decided to be a generation that raised our children, and I'm not speaking about just our biological children, not just you as parents. But what if we, as a generation, decided to raise our children with a place of contented hope in them; a hope of generosity and sacrifice and service; a hope that is bigger than anyone ever thought? And what if they saw us as the generation that finally decided that the real measurement was not what the game said? How much we have accumulated? How hard it is to get everything in that box at the end of the day? It's about what we've shared and how we've been the people of God. That is why I think this challenge is so amazing and so critical to us. It is not about running the church. It is not about providing. It is about living into the promises of God. It's about his generosity, grace and the kingdom.