

**Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
February 11 & 12, 2017
John Crosby
Your Money | Matthew 6:19**

You know, it's a privilege to be in one place for decades. In this case, to be the pastor in this community like Heather, and Rich, and Jody, because when you're here for a long time you get to see lives change, you get to see these babies baptized. Look at these terrified, sleep-deprived parents! You get to see the kids grow up through Sunday School, and you meet one of the young boys in junior high, and then the kid goes to high school, and he and his family go on a mission trip to Mexico, and you and your family and he and his family build houses together. And then the kid goes away to college and you see him just on occasion, but his mom wants to go on a trip with the church to the Journeys of Paul, and the kid comes with you, and you have a great time getting to know this young college boy. Then he goes off to med school, and then to the West Coast for his residency, and you send an email once in a while, but you stay in touch. Then he finishes his residency and decides to come back and live in Minneapolis, and you start sending more emails. He just sent me this email last week. He said a lot of other things, but he said, "Also, on the subject of life advice, as you know, my wife and I will soon experience a financial shift. We're comfortable with our past life of lowish income and life centered around debt, but come July we'll be kicked into a different financial stratosphere. Been thinking on what that means, on what God expects now for us as we buy a house, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. Any required reading you can recommend on money and biblical living?" Let me just stop for a second. Wouldn't you pray that your kid would send that message, or your grandkid, or anybody that you know? That they would want to know how to live like that, at the beginning? So I wrote him back. I said, "Hey, let's read a book together, you out there and me here. Let's read this book, it's called *Satisfied*." It's by Jeff Manion, and it's about how to discover contentment in a world of consumption. He's just about to jump into the word of consumption. How does he discover contentment? I love this book. I would love for us to do a series on contentment down the road. But since they're coming back, I'm going to use a lot of Jeff's stuff to give them advice, and maybe you can listen too.

Since they are coming back here, I thought of a town in the Bible that's a lot like Minneapolis. You see, in the first century there were huge cities in the Roman Empire. Put up the map. There was Athens, and Rome, there was Alexandria and Antioch in Syria. And one of the fourth or fifth biggest cities in the Old World was Ephesus. You can see it, it's right on the Aegean. It's a port town; it has all the goods of the world from China all the way to Morocco flowing through it, and the people there were master salespeople. All the goods of the empire. In today's terms, Ephesus is like Hong Kong or San Diego, or Singapore. Or, if you're talking about heartland cities where great agricultural centers reside, it would be Minneapolis. Well, one of the highlights of our trip following the Journeys of Paul, was when we went to Ephesus because it reminded me

so much of Minneapolis 2000 years ago. You walk into the city and as soon as you get in there you are struck by this huge mall. This huge mall goes for blocks and blocks, it's huge. I don't know any other city that has a big mall in America that would be as large, and then you go on and you realize that these people are sports fanatics, too. There is a stadium out in the countryside that is for the whole region. I don't know any other city that has a brand new billion dollar stadium, and then there is the idea that they are just as much in love with the Ordway as we are. The theater in Ephesus is unbelievable. You can stand on the stage—and I stood on the stage there—and talk in a normal voice, and the people in the top row can hear you. Unbelievable.

I love being in Minnesota. With a commitment to world class education, a research university, and yet, Ephesus is one of the ancient Wonders of the World because of the library that still stands. Ephesus and Minneapolis are a lot alike. You go through the library, you wander up the street, down the hill, that's the inside of the library. You wander up the hill and you come to a place that is called the houses on the . . . oh, that is somebody who is bringing American class to the Middle East. You can always tell who the Americans are. Anyway, where was I? These houses are just unbelievable. They look like this, they look like this again (continues to show slides). They dug down into the hill to excavate these old houses, and they were right in the center of town. They weren't out on the lake, they were a first ring suburb. They had beautiful, elaborate mosaics, they had brick walls with plaster painted murals. No time or expense was spared on these houses. They literally had furnaces to heat the house and give hot water, piping that went under the house out to the street, so they had plumbing as well. This is a world not very different from ours. People are as sophisticated and highly mobile, they are extremely commercial. They are filled with shopping centers and they are sports crazy. Sound familiar? Paul is called by God to start a new community of Jesus followers with this city, and he's there for a year-and-a-half, and then his successor, Timothy, young Timothy, probably stays there off and on for the rest of his life. The church in Ephesus is a lot like the church in Edina, it's a mixed crowd, more than you think from the wealthy city. It's a mixed crowd. You have slaves that sit in the same room with masters, you have priests that sit next to women, you have beggars that are next to the Royal Governor's Guard.

They probably met in one of those houses. All the churches were house churches, and Paul urges Timothy, this young pastor, to give guidance to this community, and he picks out one group of people that need help. And it's a little bit of a surprise because you would think he would talk about the poor, but he says, command those who are rich in this world. He wants to talk to the affluent among them in this hoity toity town. I don't know of any other first ring suburbs that have reputations for hoity toity towns, but if I did I would say that *command those that are rich in this world* is everybody within the sound of my voice.

I spent two days this week in Ethiopia and it redefines what rich in this world is, because none of you woke up and had to find light with a candle. None of you got out of bed and had to take the portable toilet, the chamber pot, and throw it out or have one of the kids do it as a chore. None of you had to go out and restart a cold house with the embers

from last night's fire. None of us had to choose whether to kill a chicken or sell a goat so that a witch doctor would come and help our sick mother.

We all are the rich in this world, but what does Paul say to us? He doesn't want to guilt us. What does Paul say to my young doctor friend in California? Well, I think the same thing he said to the Ephesians. The first thing he does though, and I hate this part of the whole sermon, he talks to the preacher. I hate it. Look at Verse 2. He says:

² These are the things I want you to teach and preach about. ³ If you have leaders who teach otherwise, who refuse the solid words of our Master Jesus and godly instruction, ⁴ tag them for what they are: ignorant windbags (I hate that) who infect the air with envy and controversy, bad-mouthing and rumors. ⁵ Eventually, that church has an epidemic of backstabbing. Truth is just a distant memory. That kind of leader thinks that religion is just a way to make a fast buck.
[paraphrase of 1 Timothy 6:2-5]

Talk about this, and what does he say? Command those rich in this world.

⁶ But Godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we take nothing out of it. [1 Timothy 6:6-7]

If you don't remember anything else, remember that phrase. "We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." Turn to the person next to you and say, "We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." Say it. Let's say it like you mean it. Let's say it together.

Response: "For we brought nothing into the word, and we can take nothing out of it."

You really don't sound like you believe it, at all. And we don't live like that either. But Paul goes on,

⁸ "But if we have food and clothing, we'll be content. If we have just food and clothing, we'll be content. ⁹ You see, those who want to get rich fall into temptation, a trap, and into foolish, harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ The love of money, [not money, but the love of money or the lust of money] is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many groups.
[1 Timothy 6:8-10]

Now what's interesting about this is that he certainly is saying this to people who are sitting right in front of him in church. Some of you are in church, but you wandered from the faith, because you love money more.

¹⁷ Command those rich in this present world not to be arrogant. Not to put their hope and wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them. [Don't suggest

this is a good idea.] Command everybody who walks through the door to do good, to be rich in good deeds, to be generous, and to be willing to share. ¹⁹ This way, they'll lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so they can take hold of the life that is really life. [1 Timothy 6:17-19]

Paul says, "I want you to really live, live the way you are supposed to." Is there an echo there of something you've ever heard before? Doesn't that just sound like Jesus? One of the reasons that we're pretty sure that Paul knew the Apostles who knew Jesus is because he echoes it. This is Jesus in Matthew. Don't lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, for where your treasure is, there is your heart.

What does Paul want for them? He wants the same thing that I want for my young doctor friend. He wants contentment. Deep contentment. Are you content today, or are you anxious? Godliness with contentment is great gain. Contentment is the cultivation of a satisfied heart. This is from Manion's book, "Contentment is not achieved through getting everything we want." You're not content if you get everything you want. "Contentment is training your heart to experience joy and peace, even when you don't have what you want." Contentment is training your heart to experience joy and peace, even when you lost the business, even when you didn't get the promotion, even when the bills pile up. Contentment.

Before I get into what goes wrong with contentment, I want to just lay one little foundation. Look at Verse 17. He says, "God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment." God's not a killjoy, He wants you to enjoy the good things of life. The psalmist says it the same way. He says, "The Lord brings forth food from the earth, wine that gladdens the heart, oil to make faces shine and bread that sustains our hearts." It's in the simple pleasures, a cup of coffee, warm home, washing machine, flushed toilets, kids playing. It's when you stop and say, oh, wow. There's a whisper from God that says, *enjoy this*. God provides it for your enjoyment. Enjoy this. And your response shouldn't be false modesty, *oh I don't know what I should do*, or pride, *I earned this*. Our response is to say, "Thank You, God. Thank you for this." What I want to do is help you move from anxiety—I don't have enough yet—or arrogance—look what I've done—to contentment. That's what Paul challenged in Ephesus, and that's what my young doctor friend is going to struggle with. Anxiety, arrogance, or contentment. Actually, I think the two often go together. I think people that appear arrogant are still pretty anxious. Those two often go together.

How do you move to contentment? I think you have to start by saying that our material longings are more formed by our culture and our cable TV, than they are by Jesus. Your spending habits, not mine of course, but your spending habits do not radically differ from the people next door to you who don't have an allegiance to Jesus. I think we need to admit it. We live in a consumer-driven, debt-ridden, advertisement-saturated culture, and the current is so strong that it takes huge intentionality to stop from being swept downstream and ultimately pulled under. No mistake. If you determine that you want contentment, you will be swimming against the current. You'll have to do what the Apostle Paul says. You will have to enroll in the school of content. To the Philippian

Church, Paul says, “I have learned the secret of being content.” It means you have to learn it, it’s not obvious. “I’ve learned the secret of being content.” And he had to learn it again and again and again, because contentment is always being killed. I am often a discontented person, and that’s what Paul warns about. He says, be content. Listen, very little is certain in life, but this is true: You get nothing when you come into the world, and you take nothing with you. Don’t obsess about the things you cannot keep. Remember that when you stroll through that massive mall. Remember that when you see the catalog. Remember that when you pull out your phone and look at Amazon that will get you any gift around the world. And when a neighbor drives up with a new car, remember that. When you can’t send your kid to Princeton, remember that. When you have to downsize the house, remember that. When you have to go to this retirement place or send Dad to that retirement place, because you can’t afford better. When there are always more bills than there is money, remember how to be content. That whisper that says, enjoy this, this not that. Don’t live in comparison. Enjoy this. Many sacrifice our spiritual lives on the altar of anxiety—I don’t have enough yet—or the altar of accumulation. If you don’t feel content this morning, if you feel trapped or drowning, or you’re just putting on a good face, I want so much for you to experience the joy of contentment, the grace that allows you to be generous. I want you to be free.

Let me give you an example. For several minutes a woman stands peering into her walk-in closet. It’s full, every hangar is used, every shelf is occupied. This is not my wife. And she scans the stockpile of clothing as she mutters to herself. What does she say? She says, “I don’t have a thing to wear.” And it strikes her right then, it strikes her as mildly humorous that she loves everything that she buys, but little that she owns. Think about that for a second. It’s as true about golf clubs as it is about clothing. Little that she buys satisfies her with what she owns. In a more contemplative moment she says, *what if the empty space that I’m attempting to fill is not in my closet*. What is the number one enemy of contentment? It’s comparison. You people compare yourselves to everybody else. No wonder you’re not happy. Comparison rarely enjoys what one person has, but instead dwells on what somebody else has. And, when you are closer to the top of the heap, comparison looks like arrogance. None of you feel arrogant, none of us feel arrogant, but you don’t have to work at becoming arrogant, you just have to do nothing about it and you will look arrogant. You and I know that Edina is not what people who drive by think it is. There are all kinds of people here, but because you have this or live here, you look arrogant.

How do you move away from that toward contentment? This is where the Apostle Paul comes true. He says, “Command them to do good, command them to be rich in good deeds.” When we serve, we get rescued from being in the center of the universe and we don’t have to compare. When we serve, it combats the narcotic effect of things. So affluent believers in Ephesus were not encouraged, they were commanded to do good. Everybody wants to do good, but let me tell you this. Doing good means you actually have to do something. This idea of doing good isn’t this idea of *thinking* about doing something good, it isn’t *raising awareness* about doing something good, it isn’t *offering* to do something good, it’s *doing* something good. Doing something small is often better

than promising everything. Doing something to serve small is better than thinking *I will do everything*.

I was here on Friday, coming home from the trip, and as I walked by the conference room it was full with a small group of people who were trying to figure out how we get a new Missions Pastor. What should we look at, as Paul goes off after 12 years? What should our new Missions Pastor be like? And the headhunter was asking, what has been the biggest thing for you? One of them, I stopped on the other side of the door, because one of them said, "For me, I'm a lawyer, and one time Crosby asked me to go to Africa, and then Crosby didn't go. And so I go to Africa with Tshihamba and we're there, we're in Uganda, and in Uganda all of the dads had died of AIDS, and all of the wives, all of the moms were left as widows. And in that culture, when the father dies, they take the widow's land and give it back to the clan, and the wife's got nothing. And they either take the kids back to the clan or they all become orphans." My friend was saying *that's not right*. And being a lawyer, he said, "Well, what you ought to do is file this writ, you ought to write up that," and he helps this woman get her land back, and it takes not a trip, not two, not three, but five or six trips, and this woman and a dozen others have their lands back, and all of a sudden people aren't stealing the land as much. And he turns to me and he says, "That service changed my life, not theirs."

Command those who appear arrogant to do good and to serve. The Creator whispers, enjoy this, enjoy this. And you say, *thank you, what am I supposed to do?* And all Jesus says, all Jesus ever says, *enjoy this and share this*. Command them to be generous, to be willing to share. People who are discontented accumulate because they are putting their hope that the next thing will make it happen, and there is never enough. Contentment liberates us, it frees us up from the illusion that any purchase can take away our loneliness, or fill our emptiness, or heal our brokenness. So if the answer to arrogance is service, the answer to anxiety about buying more is generosity. Generosity is one of the keys to being contented. It's one of the ways that you say no to more, and say yes, God, I trust You. It's the outflow of a thankful heart.

Let me just stop for one second and say, I urge you, I'm begging you, act on this, act on this immediately and decisively. Listen to this. I believe that when prompted by God to pursue generous giving, good-hearted Christians rarely say no. Everybody wants to be generous, they never say no. They always say later. My young friend, he's got nothing. He's got a house to buy. He better not say later. Don't fall victim to the deception of a well-intentioned delay in generosity. Life will pass you by. Let me close with this. One of the best gifts . . . we just did this \$12 million capital campaign. Great generosity, tons of people, best gift from me was a couple who was sitting there in the 9:30 service. They came up and they said, "We're in, we think God's behind this. We want to see the next generation flourish, we're in." But I knew this couple, we had sort of grown up together, and five or six years ago he lost his company. He didn't lose his job, he lost his whole company, and then they lost their house, and then they couldn't put their kids through grad school, and it hasn't gotten a lot better. They're still struggling. And what he said, what they said to me was, "We're in. What we think we're going to do is, we've got these old cars, and we were just about to buy a new car. We're going to hold onto these

cars for a couple more years. That's our pledge, our car payment is our pledge. Okay?" I said, "Your secret is safe with me." But every time this woman gets into her car, and sees you driving away in a great car, every time she prays that the battery will turn over. I have to tell you, God is going, *enjoy this, enjoy this*. This is life as it is meant to be.

Lord Jesus, I thank You for these sisters and brothers who squirm with me, because we have more than anybody and we are still anxious. We are worried about not having what we used to have, or what we want to have, or what we need to have. You want to give us contentment. I pray that You will sink your love deep into our hearts, and that we will put our hope in You. In a world that wants more, we will serve. In a world that buys more, we will give with generous hearts. Friends, may the love of God the Father flow into your hearts, and may the grace of God the Son fill you with hope, and may the peace, the contented peace that only God's spirit can give you, help you be generous servants. And all God's children said? Amen. Amen. Go in Peace.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.