

To God Alone Be The Glory

We just heard the apostle Paul urge us to TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT IS TRULY LIFE. But if we asked four people to explain, “What is the life that is truly life?”, I wonder if we’d get five answers.

“What is the life that is truly life?” That’s a philosophical question. And almost everywhere I look, I see people trying to answer it. Anybody who tries to sell you anything must convince you that you need what they have in order to enjoy life. But what is the life that is truly life? Whether people realize it or not, just about everyone is trying to answer that question by how they live, who their friends are, what they studied in school or what new things they are learning, what they do for hobbies and pastimes, what they get really passionate about or what excites them for the moment—all these are their answer to the question, “What is life?”

Speaking of things that excite for the moment, I finally watched last year’s movie “Avatar: The Way of Water.” Is the life that this movie portrays the life that is truly life? Some people would say Yes. But for me it’s just a movie. Movies are stories that help us think about life from different perspectives. Whenever you watch a

movie or read a book, ask yourself if the version of life being portrayed has any room for our Savior Jesus in it. Sorry, not much room for Jesus in the second Avatar movie. But this movie could be used as an excellent springboard for discussing the huge role our Savior Jesus plays in how we interact with others and with our environment. These are important ideas, but ...

TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT IS TRULY LIFE. According to the Bible life is “being connected to God through faith in Jesus.” Through faith. How do you picture faith? I like the picture of a hand. Even if your hand takes hold of something with a weak grip, you still have it. So even if your faith-connection to Jesus is weak, you’re still connected to him. But the Bible encourages us (1 Timothy 6:19, 2 Peter 3:18, the Proverbs, 2 Kings 3:5-12) to really grab hold of Jesus, as if he were a merry-go-round spinning fast and you were holding on so as not to fall off. TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT IS TRULY LIFE.

If it feels like the Lord is asking a lot of us, well, he is. Sometimes life itself feels like a merry-go-round, but with the bully Satan purposely spinning the ride faster and faster so as to make it hard for us to keep a grip on what is true and good. Sometimes the troubles

we face are like centrifugal force that swing our feet out behind us. When you're grasping life's merry-go-round, do you ever look at your hands and say, "I don't know how much longer I can hold on"? At such times look more closely at your hands. The Bible would like you to see that God has his hands wrapped around your wrists. And then you realize, "Okay, God wants me to hold on to him, but it's even more important that God is holding onto me."

Now that God has hold of us through our Savior's work, we are ready to discuss some of the ways the Lord wants us to grab hold of him, to TAKE HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT IS TRULY LIFE. Our text says,

¹⁷*Command those who are rich in this present world...* Hmm. I wonder how many of us are saying, "God's not talking to me right now. He's talking to all those rich people." OK, most of us are not rich American standards, but even the poorest among us is richer than half the world. It can be good to be rich, as long as we listen to God's instructions to the rich. God is talking to us right now. Let's listen.

¹⁷*Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain...* There they are—the twin dangers that wealth poses for us believers in Jesus. First, arrogance.

"My bank account [or truck] is bigger [newer] than yours, so I'm better." Or we might look in the mirror and say, "Congratulations, you! You own so much good stuff—don't you feel great?!" [Sometimes this even happens to church people: "I give more offerings than most, so the church should do things my way."] But in the Lord's eyes, 'who is rich' and 'who is poor' doesn't really matter. God is the real owner of everything—we're just managing some of his wealth for him. And more importantly we all got rescued from sin by the same Jesus in the same way. O forgiven believers, don't be arrogant about your wealth. What you have is from God, and it's still his.

The other danger that wealth poses for us believers is that it *is so uncertain*. Recession and inflation and bear markets can eat up wealth like a hungry dog set loose in a hamburger factory. Or you could get too unhealthy to enjoy your wealth. Or thieves could take it. Or you could die. Wealth is so uncertain. The Proverbs say (23:5), "*Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle.*" Wealth is uncertain.

¹⁷*Command those who are rich in this present world...to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Ah, now that's the life—to enjoy whatever you have and say, “Thanks, God. This pleasure comes from you. Enjoyment is a gift from you (see Ecclesiastes). You taught me to ask for daily bread. But you have provided more than I need.”*

If you have more than three sets of clothes, you are rich! God has more in this text to teach rich folks.

¹⁸*Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds. What a great thing to strive for—“to be rich in good deeds” and not just in earthly things! Let's ask ourselves, “What am I going to do for others this week? I'd like to find a way to help someone.”*

“Good deeds? Why is the pastor promoting good deeds? I thought Lutherans don't believe in good deeds.” Oh contraire! Here is one of many places that the Bible teach good deeds (see also Matthew 5–7, Titus 2:11-14). Good deeds are absolutely necessary for us Christians to do... just not for our salvation. Here's a Bible passage you know. “*It is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast*” (Ephesians 2:8-9, see also Titus 3:5, Romans 3–4). God

saved us completely without our good deeds. But as soon as he brought us to faith in Jesus, we started doing good works. “*We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do*” (Ephesians 2:10).

That's why the apostle Paul teaches the young pastor Timothy in our text: ¹⁸*Command [the rich] to be generous and willing to share. The Greek word for “willing to share” also gives us our word for “fellowship,” not the kind where we eat a potluck dinner in the church fellowship hall, but the kind where we bond over our shared faith in Jesus, our shared love for each other, and our love for reaching those who don't know Jesus yet. These spiritual connections make us willing to share with those in need. True, sometimes people are in need because they mismanaged their money and didn't save anything for a rainy day. But if someone is hungry, that's a real need. There are other real needs. And we should help, not necessarily by giving them what they ask for, but definitely helping them with their real needs if we are able.*

“Pastor, it almost sounds like you're saying we ought to give all our wealth away.” It might sound like that, but I'm not. It's okay to say No to many of the charities who ask for donations.

On the other hand, we should not hold on to all our wealth as if to say, “This is mine. Go get your own.”

Somewhere in between ‘giving it all away’ and ‘keeping it all’ is a place each of us gets to choose, a place where we can *be generous and willing to share*. Maybe your sharing will happen a little each week or month. Maybe your sharing happens once every five years in a bigger way. If you are willing to share, as God commands, he will direct an opportunity your way that isn’t a scam. When you find a need that moves your heart, have God’s kind of fun filling it.

Paul says, ¹⁹*In this way [you] will lay up treasure for [your]selves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that [you] may take hold of the life that is truly life*. The apostle is not teaching us that every twenty dollars given away is a day stored up for us in heaven. Rather God wants us to derive real enjoyment from our wealth by sharing some of it with others. Even unbelievers know the joy of sharing. The main difference is ‘who gets the glory for the giving.’ Another difference might be that our giving often has the goal or the result of creating an opportunity to share the good news that God forgives all sinners through faith in Jesus. Then there’s the fact that when we help others, God counts it as if we were

helping him (see Matthew 25:34-36). Generosity is a part of the life that is truly life.

²⁰*Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care*. What was entrusted to his care? The truth about God’s love in Jesus. “Guard” it means preserve it. Don’t let any errors get mixed in, not even from well-intentioned fellow Christians. *Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge,* ²¹*which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith*. Guard the truth carefully, but not so carefully that you keep it to yourself. Pass it on, especially to the next generation, so they can tell the generation after that. Teach them to turn away from any idea that contradicts the Bible’s message. Too many people have already wandered from the faith because they got too smart for the Holy Spirit and decided that their ideas are better than God’s teachings.

But everyone of us who sticks with God’s teachings **TAKES HOLD OF THE LIFE THAT IS TRULY LIFE**. To all of us Paul says, *Grace be with you*. God’s gift of love be with you. To be connected to God through faith in Jesus—that’s real life.