

Go for Godliness

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It is lovely to be back at Brunfield. I got the same butterflies as I walked down Leamington Terrace. It's great to see many faces I know.

It's not even greater, but it is also good to see many faces I don't know. I've always suspected there's something in the water at Brunfield where the older people are looking younger and the young people are looking so old. Some of them were little boys when I left and know the hulking bruises of human flesh. I am super nervous, so let me pray and then we'll get to work.

Father God, of all the 336 half-hour slots in our week, what lies before us now is the most important by far. Please, Lord, speak to us. Our greatest need is to be nourished by your word, changed by your truth, and be captivated again by your Son. We not only need your truth penetrating our ears, but also inscribed by your Spirit on our hearts. Please, Lord, give us open ears, soft hearts, attentive minds, malleable wills, and transform lives. And we have the audacity to pray this before you, our Father, simply because of Jesus who died, that we might live. Amen. I wonder, what are you investing in? What are you investing your life in today? So much of our culture is obsessed with investment. I was down in London and so much of London works on this idea of putting something in now to reap a great reward in the future. What seeds are you sowing that might yield a great harvest down the line? What are you thinking about buying a house? You want a house that not only fulfills your needs now, but when it comes to selling it in a few years' time, will propel you along the property ladder. Which degree are you pursuing in order to offer the best possible chance for a vocation once you graduate? Which friendships are you pouring yourself into, thinking that they're going to provide support and companionship for many years to come? Where are your savings? In the bank earning less than 2% or somewhere else, maybe taking a punt on stocks and shares. What are you investing in?

What are you pouring yourself into? There are lots of good things to pour yourself into. The Apple computing company in 1980 would have been a good thing to pour your savings into. One share worth \$22 at the time would now be worth \$28,197. That would do you for a while. Or Jeff Bezos and Amazon in 1997, if you bought one share for \$18 and held on to it, that share once it had been diluted a few times and multiplied would now be worth \$42,120. A really good investment. Or if in 2009 you'd bought one Bitcoin for \$0.000 and had held on to it for the subsequent 12 years, that Bitcoin would now be worth \$59,262.20.

Investment in Bitcoin would have been very lucrative. If you'd have spent all of a dollar on 1,250 Bitcoins, just imagine how much wealth you would have accrued. We spent so much time thinking about investment. So much time deciding where we're going to put our stuff in order to get more stuff. During my time down in London, I got to hang out with a gentleman who is the longest serving hedge fund manager in the city of London history. He's been there through boom and bust.

[4 : 16] His portfolio is incredibly successful. If he'd have invested one pound with him in 1953 when he started, that pound would now be worth £1,680. He's been there through boom and bust. Very long and distinguished career. He is a legend of the city of London. And before he left, he shared the one overarching investment principle that will serve you a lifetime. It is top secret. And I'm going to share it with you now. It is the fail-safe way of investing in a way that will yield nothing but dividends, nothing but reward and sizable profits along the way. This is very lucrative information. If you've got a pen and paper, I would get them out. Priceless information. His advice is that the number one thing to invest in is this. Godliness with contentment. Godliness with contentment.

Godliness with contentment. To be honest, this advice is not his. It's not new. It's not original to him. In fact, it is very old indeed and comes from the letter of 1 Timothy that you've been studying for the last few weeks. It is right in the middle of our passage this morning in 1 Timothy 6, so please turn

there with me. 1 Timothy 6 and halfway through verse 2. Paul writes this, teach and urge these things. 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. Verse 6. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing 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 evil.

It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. The time of writing, the church in Ephesus is thoroughly disordered. There was asceticism being promoted.

[7 : 21] There was punch-ups at the prayer meeting. I guess that's one of the reasons to do it on Zoom. There's less chance of a punch-up on Zoom. Sunday mornings had become a fashion show. Wayward elders and deacons were bringing scandal on the church.

There was drunkenness. Other people were dishonestly sponging off the church. Gossip was rife. Accusations were flying. And Christians were even slacking off their work because they worked for Christian bosses and thought that it didn't matter.

1 Timothy is therefore a crisis letter written by the Apostle Paul to his troubleshooting protégé, Timothy. Paul has charged Timothy with bringing health back to the church.

He wants them to, he wants Timothy to close down the distorted leaders who were not teaching the truth. These people were distorting the truth, disturbing believers and ultimately destroying the church.

Paul envisioned this happening back in Acts chapter 20 when he says to the Ephesian elders, from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away disciples after them, not making disciples of the Lord Jesus, but making disciples of themselves.

[8 : 41] These false teachers are everywhere in the letter. So 1 Timothy 1 verse 3, we introduced to them. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.

Nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculation, rather than the stewardship from God which is by faith. And verse 6, certain persons by swerving from these have wandered away into vain discussion.

And then down in verse 19 of chapter 1. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

They crop up again in chapter 4 verse 1. Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and abstinence from foods, that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. They're everywhere. But now in chapter 6 he attacks them head on. He has them in his sights. These dodgy preachers are leading a distorted church.

[10 : 13] Because they're not preaching the gospel, there's no power in it. And therefore the church has just devolved into an unholy group of sinners playing pretend at being church.

And no wonder there's divisions. No wonder it's divisive. No wonder it's disintegrating. And amidst the chaos of Ephesus, Timothy's overarching task is to teach and urge the congregation in sound doctrine and to set an example for the church in sound living.

That is how our passage starts. Look with me halfway through verse 2. Teach and urge these things, Paul writes. Now these things are definitely all that he's been teaching since chapter 5 verse 1.

All the ways that the interpersonal relationships are to happen in the church. But the things he's to teach and urge also are what follows in our passage.

The headline for this morning is this. Godliness with contentment is great gain. Godliness for gain is destructive. Godliness with contentment is great gain.

[11 : 32] The letter of 1 Timothy has had two big things already to say about godliness in the letter. The first is in chapter 3 verse 16.

This is what it says. Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness. He was manifested in the flesh.

Paul's teaching is that the mystery of godliness is not a list of rules and regulations. It's not a list of do's and don'ts. It's not about pulling your socks up and trying a little bit harder.

The key to godliness is the person and work of the Lord Jesus. Great indeed is the mystery of godliness. He was manifest in the flesh.

He was incarnated, what we learned in Matthew 1.21, with Peter. He was vindicated by the Spirit. He not only died, but he rose from the dead.

[12 : 30] He ascended. He was seen by angels. He was proclaimed among the nations. He was proclaimed. The gospel went out. And there were conversions because people believed.

And not only that, but it's all coming to a glorious end when the Lord Jesus returns and all his people are glorified. This is so important when we think about godliness.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. What is godliness? Well, it flows from the person of the Lord Jesus. Philip Jensen says our greatest problem when we think about godliness is that we spell it wrong.

And we add an extra O. That we think godliness is goodliness and it's about behaving well. When that's always going to shortchange you, the key to godliness is being obsessed with the Lord Jesus. And as we focus on him, he rubs off on us. You want to be godly? Don't make New Year's resolutions. Have better personal devotions.

[13 : 36] Godliness flows from the person of the Lord Jesus. The second thing we've learnt is in 1 Timothy 4 verse 8.

This is a great verse if you're a gym buff. 1 Timothy 4 verse 8. For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way.

As it holds promise for the present life. And also for the life to come. Yes, hit the gym, says Paul. Yes, don't be afraid of a protein shake or a bicep curl. Or a few squats as you watch Joe Wicks.

Do it. It's of some value. But don't confuse something of some value with something that's of ultimate value. And the thing of ultimate value is training yourself in godliness.

Godliness is the most precious commodity in all of the world. So invest in that, says Paul. Because it will last you a lifetime and on into eternity. Which is not quite true of your rippling six-pack.

[14 : 41] To invest in godliness is of immeasurable value. And eternally so. Paul then gives a wonderful illustration.

Verse 7 of chapter 6. For we brought nothing into the world. And we cannot take anything out of the world.

I remember being at St. Thomas' Hospital on the 3rd of September 2020. And after a very sleepless night, at 11 o'clock in the morning, the midwife handed me Isaac Judson Gemmel.

Though he wasn't called Isaac Judson Gemmel at the time. That was a few hours later before we decided on that. And there he was. A little squidgy pink mass of flesh with a very serious look on his face.

She handed him to me and that was it. He didn't come with a suitcase or a rucksack. He didn't have a wallet or a mobile phone. He didn't have house keys or car keys.

[15 : 46] That was him in his entirety. Of course he had very strong genes and boyish good looks, as you would expect. But he came into the world with nothing.

And that's going to be exactly the same as when he goes out. What he's placed in the cradle with is exactly the same thing he's going to be placed in the coffin with. Nothing.

And that's really got to orientate our thinking, I think. That if we can invest our lives now in something that will last forever, then godliness is your only bet.

Go for godliness. Godliness with contentment is great gain. As godliness is the only thing of ultimate value that will last. You see, investing life in Jesus, the source of godliness, is the only shrewd decision.

At the end of the game, all the chess pieces go in the same box. Whether you are a prince or a pauper, a hedge fund manager or a hedge trimmer.

[16 : 58] All goes to the same place. What Isaac Judson Gemmel came out with is the best it's going to get for him at the end. So it is idiocy to focus all your attention on temporal treasure.

Which will last for this brief moment. And then you'll leave it behind. What do we actually need? Verse 8.

But if we have food and clothing with these, we will be content. That's all you need. For these three score years and ten, I'm very thankful that all of you have checked the second box.

I know if you have turned up to be naked worshippers this morning, we've all got clothes. And I dare say the struggle for most of us is not too few calories, but too many.

And so we have all that we need to be content. We have food and clothing. And with those two boxes tick, let's go for godliness with contentment.

[18 : 04] Think how much simpler and more straightforward life would be if our only goal every day was to tick clothing and to tick food. And then spend the rest of our energy left once those priorities are in place, forging a stronger and deeper and more intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus.

That would be life transforming. But yet we all spend so much of our life accumulating trinkets, polishing things that will only rust and be destroyed.

If you get up every morning and having had a shower and got dressed and your breakfast, and you say these three things to yourself. Am I naked? No. Hallelujah.

Am I hungry? No. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. Jesus, help me today to live for you and love you more than I did yesterday.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. Now, I'm not saying don't be lazy. I'm not saying lack ambition. I'm not saying don't enjoy all the good things that God gives us.

[19 : 15] But I'm saying let all the stuff in your life find its position behind your relationship with the Lord Jesus. Because godliness with contentment is great gain.

And everything else is a bonus to be enjoyed with thankfulness. And to be shared and held very lightly. Use your treasure to show that your treasure isn't your treasure, but that Jesus is your treasure.

That investment principle, says my friend Andrew Green, it'll last you a lifetime. Because godliness with contentment is great gain. But this clear teaching is sandwiched between the two enemies that will so readily impinge on that simplicity.

So look with me at verses 3 to 5. Godliness for gain is destructive. Godliness for gain is destructive. Verse 3. 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.

[20 : 26] 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.

If the source of godliness is the Lord Jesus, then anything that is communicated to you that doesn't tell the truth of the Lord Jesus is incredibly toxic, incredibly erosive.

It should be avoided like the plague. That cliché has a lot more traction these days than it ever used to. This whole passage uses four different phrases to describe the true teaching about Jesus.

See? The sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ. The teaching that accords with doctrine, with godliness. They're both in verse 3.

And then verse 5 we have mention of the truth. And then in verse 10 the same synonym, the faith. Departure from the gospel will lead to a distortion of your priorities.

[21 : 43] That is definitely the case in Ephesus. Do you see what he says in verse 4? If anyone teaches, well they do, that's why Timothy is there to shut these guys down, then there is great loss.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. Then anything that erodes godliness is great loss. And let me show you how terrible these people are.

Do you see they're errant? Verse 4, these people are errant. They teach different doctrine. They teach falsehoods that are in disagreement with the sound words of the Lord Jesus.

They don't promote godliness. These teachers are corrupt. They are errant. But see also, they are arrogant. They are puffed up with conceit.

A particular pitfall for the new convert who becomes an elder in chapter 3 verse 6. They're like the puffer fish. Just full of air.

[22 : 47] Looks scary and impressive, but then all too quickly deflate and show that there's no substance. They're just windbags. Not only are they arrogant, they're also ignorant.

It's so emphatic. They understand nothing. Rather than singing, tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love, they like singing the song, let me give you the new, new insights. And it's no insight at all because they know nothing. Behind the facade, there is absolute ignorance. They're just making it up out of their head. Not only are they errant, arrogant and ignorant, they're also belligerent.

They care more about arguments than they do about the truth. Do you see it there? They have an unhealthy craving for controversy. Any teaching that doesn't humble you under grace will always result in error and problems and pride.

without the gospel of grace, there's always arguments to be won and factions to be formed. And they produce terrible things amongst their hearers.

[24 : 05] They produce envy that all of a sudden these people teaching false doctrine gather a few disciples after themselves and there's a split in the church. That leads to dissension.

There is now a chasm building between the seeming haves and the have-nots. The people who have been inducted into this new teaching and those that are still in the kindergarten seemingly just clinging to Jesus and trusting the gospel.

After this dissension and factionalism, this then manifests itself in talking past each other. Slander, trash talk, lies, all kinds of falsehood.

That manifests into evil suspicions that this is now just words but this is heartfelt motives that are espoused on other people. And before you know it, a great chasm has erupted.

There's now going to be a church plant. A split disguised as a church plant. So the false teachers contaminate and corrupt their hearers.

[25 : 06] It's not a nice place to be. constant friction among people. The members meeting, the hymn books fly and no wonder there's punch-ups at the prayer meeting.

This is, if you like, the complete antithesis of the fruit of the Spirit. Rather than love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, there is instead from this teaching the fruit of conceit, ignorance, quarrelling, envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction.

it's not a good option, is it? False teaching from the front leads to terrible things in the pew, all germinating from the falsehood of these conceited teachers.

Rather than pointing people to be happy and holy in Jesus, this teaching only drives people to greater and greater levels of depravity as their worldly mind is kept focused on worldly things.

It's a terrifying couplet that Paul finishes with. Depraved in mind and deprived of the truth. The truth has been usurped and their lives are not godly, they're depraved.

[26 : 26] See how verse 5 finishes? They imagine that godliness is a means of gain. Scary truth. Leave revelation and all you have is speculation and imagination.

This is where it ends up, godliness as a means of gain. This is an infection that is still in our churches today. You'll find it in this city on many corners.

Even, I dare say, it crouches in our own hearts. But we have twisted the truth and godliness has become a means of getting rather than an end in itself.

Where Jesus is not our fulfillment but Jesus is our way of finding fulfillment in something else. It is subtle and absolutely pernicious. Godliness of a means of gain is the prosperity gospel in a nutshell.

You're poor, you want to be rich, come to Jesus as the means and the ends will be you are rich. Godliness as a means of gain. The therapeutic gospel, you feel dissatisfied and incomplete.

[27 : 36] You don't like how your life has turned out. Come to Jesus and you'll find yourself happier, healthier, more fulfilled and with real purpose in your life.

Godliness as a means of gain. Not Jesus in and of himself but Jesus as a way of getting something for yourself. This is the gospel of me-ism in a nutshell.

You feel like you've been overlooked for most of your life and yet coming to Jesus gives you power. People will listen to you. People will honor and value you and see you for the tremendous individual that you've always been.

Jesus not the ends but a means to an ends. Jesus not a destination but the delivery boy who will get you what you've always wanted. This is the gospel we so easily believe in our own sinful hearts.

Godliness of a means of gain. Jesus I went to church you now owe me I would like this. Or I've served you so faithfully for all these years and I get this diagnosis are you kidding me?

[28 : 49] That is godliness as a means of gain. Jesus as a means of getting rather than a glorious ends in himself. What is pictured here is the dipolar opposite of godliness with contentment.

It's godliness as a means to greater levels of consumption. So I was thinking about this this week I think a key diagnostic of whether we're going down this terrible track is in our prayer life.

I don't think it's any wonder that 1 Timothy 2 starts with the prayer meeting because I think it's in the prayer meeting we diagnose whether we are errant and arrogant and ignorant and belligerent.

When I think about my prayers are they consumed with God's glory and his purposes in the world or are they consumed with little old me and what's going on in my life? is Jesus the gravitational center of my life or am I the gravitational center of my life?

Am I praying for God's glory in the world or am I praying for my own personal benefit? if I had a friend who was obsessed with his goldfish called Dipper and every time we spoke all he did was tell me about Dipper the goldfish the weight he'd put on the number of laps he'd done of his tank let me tell you we're not going to be friends for very long because that is really dull and boring if your life is completely subsumed by your goldfish called Dipper and then I wonder how much of my prayer life is taken up with my little goldfish life coming to God with my own little complaints and my own little things and me at the center do my prayers portray a certainty that godliness with contentment is great gain or do I think my godliness and my prayer life is only a means of me getting for myself so destructive stems from a corrupted view of the gospel from the front falsehood is taught and in your own heart grows the unfruit of the unspirit it's destructive it's the cul-de-sac of stupidity

[31 : 15] I don't have enough stuff doesn't satisfy me so I'll get some more stuff thinking that a little bit more of something that doesn't satisfy will satisfy and it's ridiculous godliness as a means of gain is destructive and secondly imagining that godliness greediness for more brings ruin do you see how it finishes in verse 9 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 if the first enemy is from the front to your heart leading to ruin then this is from your heart to your life and it leads to ruin it's a terrible thing that not a conceited mind is driving this but a covetous heart an insatiable desire for more I must be rich at any cost the picture painted draws so many images as it charts the downward wandering spiral away from the church away from the eternal worth of godliness with contentment do you see what it says but those who desire to be rich fall into temptation a sudden departure from truth a sudden not pursuing

Jesus but pursuing stuff they fall into temptation and once they've fallen into temptation and gone after stuff they become ensnared by their stuff the things they own end up owning them I now have a mortgage I can't afford so I've got to be all in I've now got to follow good money after bad to keep the stuff that I've accumulated I now become one who takes riskier and riskier decisions to keep the stuff that I have and to afford the repayments that I've accrued I need to be rich therefore a little bit of embezzling funds from my work doesn't matter I need to be rich therefore lying about people to get a promotion before them is fine I need to be rich therefore I'll steal and borrow this I need to be rich I'll invest in that shady enterprise or this shady enterprise and it ends after being entrapped with people having bigger and bigger imaginations bigger and bigger dreams and writing checks that they can never afford to cash and after the imagination of riches they think will satisfy we end up being plunged literally shipwrecked the exact same thing of

Hymenaeus and Alexander in chapter 1 verse 19 shipwrecked by their internal desires decoupling them from Jesus and capsizing their whole lives resulting in eternal loss so Paul comes into land with this it is the love of money that is the root of all evil notice it's the love of money not money itself money's quite useful if you need to buy clothes and food it turns out the bartering system is not as prevalent in Edinburgh as perhaps it once was the destructive influence is not money but it's the love of money where it's not godliness with contentment it is greediness for cash it's the mantra of our world of upward mobility be a bit richer get a bit more do a bit better be a bit more respected the people who think their luck is a living hell and therefore money becomes their functional saviour that lifts them out of the hell they're in it finishes with a grotesque image it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and have pierced themselves literally impaled themselves with many pangs the stuff the stuff that they've accrued has turned out to be incredibly sharp and they've actually impaled themselves they thought it was going to be a long life of leisurely lunches enjoying the stuff that they'd accrued but instead it tripped them up and they actually impaled themselves on the things that they were storing so the message is very clear friends be very careful making your life about stuff and money is the way to present and eternal loss it just is making your

life about

Jesus and the godliness that flows from being coupled with him that is a life of contentment and worth and eternal gain godliness with contentment will do you all of this present life and will last you for all eternity as well be clear this is where the investment needs to be made think of this when you go into work on Monday morning think of this when it comes to making bigger purchases and seemingly better purchases is the overriding mantra of your life godliness with contentment and then if it is make very shrewd decisions but ensure that your treasure isn't your ultimate treasure this in a culture is to stick out like a very healthy thumb because our world is materialistic and it's more more me more and it's me me me and so to be somebody who exhibits godliness with contentment is to be someone who sticks out like a healthy thumb somebody who's going to be given lots of opportunities to give the reason for the hope that they have the great sickness of our world is not that we have nothing to be thankful for it's that we have no one to be thankful to and the lord jesus has saved you from that he saved you to be somebody who knows that every good and perfect gift comes down from above from your father in heaven who does not change like sinking sand so i want to come into land with this experiment i wonder if we all clubbed together and made a tv home makeover show i'd like to call it moderate designs each episode it would take five minutes the host would give a guided tour of a family home and then the builders and experts and architects and workmen would say something like this as you can see this home is brimming with potential there were all kinds of renovations that could be done an extension that could be erected by folding doors that could be utilized not to mention room for a garage with self-contained apartment above however it does the job pretty well as it is it is warm and dry and comfortable there are no structural problems and it is fairly energy efficient i'm going to encourage the family to be content and leave it as it is take all of the worry and all of the wealth and pour it over to the gospel of Jesus Christ then we would run the final credits you see this is the truth this morning but godliness with contentment is great gain for we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of the world may that be true of your life may that be true of my life go for godliness it is the only thing of any value that is worth you investing any of your life in let me pray father god we confess that we know the song turn your eyes upon jesus really well falls off our tongue about the things of earth growing strangely dim and yet in all honesty we are captivated by stuff enamored by things and more preoccupied with earthly bank balances than with heavenly treasure father god please assure us of your bounteous goodness your loving provision and our glorious future and may these truths reorientate us to be those who strive for godliness with contentment father this needs a work of your spirit to renovate us from the inside out and truly captivate us with the promise of life father may this eclipse the trinkets and trappings of our existence we pray that you would truly be we pray that we would be truly captivated by jesus and ever satisfied in him we are so thankful to be given another chance to be changed by you so please come and reprioritize our affections and reform our desires we pray this in the wonderful ever satisfying and eternally glorious name of jesus christ amen