

10th Sun. after Pent.
August 21, 2011

In God We Trust (Not Money)

Pastor Michael Ewart
1 Timothy 6:17-19

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the message we will hear from God's Word today, our God will teach us that we are to **trust in him, not in earthly wealth**. I find it interesting that this exact truth is printed on all U.S. currency. On every U.S. coin and bill, you will find the motto, "In God We Trust." This piqued my interest and I decided to do a little bit of research regarding how that motto got there.

The phrase, of course, is derived from the Bible. But it first formally appeared on the U.S. political scene in 1814, when the man who wrote the Star-Spangled Banner, Francis Scott Key, included the phrase in its final stanza: "And this be our motto: In God is our trust."

The motto was not used on coinage until 1864 when it appeared on the new two-cent coin. By 1909 it was included on most of the other coins. But it wasn't until 1954, just one month after the phrase "under God" was included in the Pledge of Allegiance, that the law was passed requiring that the motto be included on all coins and currency. And maybe this will surprise you, but in 1956 the phrase "In God We Trust" was legally adopted as the national motto of the United States.

Ever since the first coin included the motto in 1864, there has only been one president of the United States who opposed having the motto on our currency. Who it was, and why he opposed it will surprise you. It wasn't Obama, or Clinton, or any other modern president. It was President Theodore Roosevelt who opposed it back in 1907. And his reason for opposing it will surprise you. Quoted in the New York Times, Roosevelt said:

"My own feeling in the matter is due to my very firm conviction that to put such a motto on coins, or to use it in any kindred manner, not only does no good, but does positive harm, and is in effect irreverence, which comes dangerously close to sacrilege. A beautiful and solemn sentence such as the one in question should be treated and uttered only with that fine reverence which necessarily implies a certain exaltation of spirit. Any use which tends to cheapen it, and above all, any use which tends to secure its being treated in a spirit of levity, is from every standpoint profoundly to be regretted."

In other words, Roosevelt thought that we were demeaning those words by printing them on currency. He saw this as a second commandment issue. He thought people were taking God's name in vain because people would joke about it being on the currency.

Whether it should be on the currency or not is something I do not wish to debate. But I do wish to take the phrase in all seriousness and consider how profoundly important it truly is. "In God We Trust." And it truly is at least ironic that the phrase is found on that stuff people most often trust in place of God: Money.

In our reading today, we're looking at the end of St. Paul's first letter to a young pastor named Timothy. Paul knew that Timothy has some rich members in his congregation. He had some advice for Timothy as to what he should teach those rich members, and how he should admonish them.

The reading begins: "Command those who are rich..." I want to stop there before I read any more, because I'm afraid I just lost most of you. "Oh, this command applies to the rich!"

Good! The rich need to be reprimanded once in a while. But that's definitely not me. Apparently there won't be much for me today in this sermon."

Not so fast. I would suggest to all of you today, that all of you are rich. I could be wrong, but I don't believe any of you here today are poor. Compared to the income of the rest of the world, you are rich. Compared to the conditions most people must live in, you are rich.

Compared to the conditions that even the rich lived in a few hundred years ago, you are filthy rich. You live better than the kings of old. You actually have indoor plumbing. Your house is precisely climate controlled. Your mattress is comfortable and your sheets are soft. Your daily transportation is far more comfortable, fast and reliable than anything rich King Solomon rode in, or any Caesar from the height of the Roman Empire. In almost every measure, you are rich.

I'm not saying you feel that way. My Dad used to like to joke, "We're poor, just on a higher level." He often felt poor because he didn't have spare money to spend however he wanted. He had to be careful and economize where possible. That made him feel like a poor person sometimes. But, as a sales rep he had a six-figure annual income more often than not. And we lived in a 4,000 sq.foot home on 5 acres. And he usually had two or three collectors automobiles at any given time. But while we were certainly blessed in the abundance of our possessions, it wasn't always easy to make ends meet. So he concluded he was poor, just on a higher level than some people.

I'm guessing that most, if not all, of you feel the same way. I doubt that most of you do not have more money than you know what to do with. I'm guessing most of you have some debts you'd need to pay off. I'm guessing most of you don't feel rich at all. But... you are. You really are rich by world standards present and past. So these words of Scripture apply to you. You are the rich man being talked about here. So please 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, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. ¹⁸ Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. ¹⁹ In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

God gives us two really good reasons to trust in him, and not in earthly wealth.

(1) This present world is not all there is. This present world is passing away. It's only temporary. You know this well, but we don't always live it: Whatever you accumulate here you cannot take into eternal life. Maybe you've seen the bumper sticker, "Whoever dies with the most toys wins." That's a lie. Whoever dies with the most toys is dead... just like the person who died with no toys. So God wants us to focus our attention on the riches that last for eternity, not on the riches that last for time. How foolish it is to be arrogant about earthly wealth. It reveals a heart that's terribly misguided.

ILLUSTRATION: Can you imagine someone playing Monopoly and having a great game. He's just cleaning up. He has Boardwalk AND Park Place with hotels on them. And all the yellows just before the Go to Jail square with hotels. He's cleaning up on the other players. Then someone calls him up and says, "Hey, I've got an opportunity you can't pass up. Come over to my house right now! We can make a thousand dollars each!" But the man replies, "No

way! I'm way richer than that playing Monopoly here. There's no way I can walk away from the cash I'm raking in here." The man forfeits real money for fake money.

God wants us to understand this: What you have earned and accumulated here on earth is like Monopoly money. Certainly it has real use here in this world. But it's of no benefit in eternity. When the game is over, everything you have goes back to the banker. The question is, will you receive the eternal riches God gives in heaven?

(2) The second reason God wants you to trust him and not money is that earthly wealth is always uncertain. The recent economic conditions have certainly reminded us of that, haven't they? After a couple decades of fairly stable growth, we are in economically turbulent times. The stocks rise 5% one day, and the very next they drop 5%. Today you have a job, tomorrow you may not. Your house can be destroyed, your prized car can be wrecked. Don't put your hope in wealth. It's uncertain. Put your hope in God.

Why put your hope in God? Because unlike wealth, God's help is certain. 1) He provides for you now and gives things for your enjoyment. Whatever wealth you do have is a gift from God. Honor the giver, not the gift. Put your trust in the giver, not the gift. 2) More importantly he provides all things for you for eternity through his Son Jesus. It's guaranteed! It's certain!

So, let me ask you this. Even our MONEY reminds us to trust in God! But have you been trusting in God? Or have you trusted in money. Have you ever lived by the principal, "In wealth I trust." Unless it's just not there for me or lets me down, then maybe I'll give God a shot.

Friends, understand this: God wants to be the engine at the head of the train that is your life. He wants all your trust and confidence in him. Let's be honest. Sometimes we make earthly wealth the engine at the head of the train which is our life. Money is what drives us. Money is what leads us. Understand that the track money pulls you down end in a solid cement wall every time. If you let pursuit of earthly wealth lead you, you will not end up where you want to be. Guaranteed.

Instead put your trust in God. In God we trust. Because when he leads and we trust, the place we reach is heaven and God's eternal riches.

So this morning, with the power that only the Holy Spirit gives, would recognize that your trust in earthly wealth has been offense to God and damaging to your soul? Would you recognize just how hurt God is that you would put the gift ahead of the Giver? Go to him and ask him forgiveness. And then know this: for the guilt of your misplaced trust, God has solution for you. He sent his Son, his perfect Son, his Son who never cared a bit about earthly wealth. He trusted his Father completely and used earthly wealth only to help others. And then the perfect Lord Jesus willingly took up your misplaced trust, took the burden, took the blame, and carried it with him to a rough wooden cross where he took nails in hands and feet and the extreme anger of his Father. He endured the punishment you should have received and announced it was finished. He gave up his life in order to give you life. You are forgiven. You are loved by God. He promises you he will provide you with all you need now, and riches beyond your wildest imagination for all eternity in his immediate presence in heaven.

Isn't this amazing news? Doesn't this just fill you with peace, joy and happiness? So now what? With our hearts recalibrated and imprinted with the motto: "In God We Trust", how will our lives look different?

“18 Command [those who are rich... you and me...] to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

So instead of letting wealth be the engine that drives our life, and instead of making earthly wealth the goal of our existence, instead we let earthly wealth be an instrument of praise to our God who has and will provide for all our needs. In response to his generous providence and care, we are rich in good deeds. We be generous with all that God has entrusted us and share with others. When our motto becomes, “In God We Trust,” we have a laid a foundation that sets up for an eternity of riches... true riches... and true life... life that really is life. Life with God in his presence forever in heaven, never wanting anything, never lacking.

Friends don't let that motto printed on our currency become meaningless to you, or the object of levity as Roosevelt feared. For that motto is not our nation's motto, but first and foremost God's motto for all human beings. For through his Son he proved that he is most trustworthy, and he goes to extreme lengths to shower us with eternal blessings. In God we trust (not money or earthly wealth.) Yes, in God we trust! Amen.