

Littlebourne Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2025 – 1 Timothy 6:17-21 – PH

*<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. <sup>19</sup> 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.*

*<sup>20</sup> Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, <sup>21</sup> which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.*

*Grace be with you all.*

Last week we had “fight the good fight” and a doxology. Over the past three months we have gone through this letter which has covered warnings against false teachers, advice on how to worship, how women should behave and dress, the character qualifications for overseers and deacons (and their wives), encouragement to Timothy because he’s young, advice on how to treat widows, older men and slaves, warnings against the ungodly and lovers of money. Last week we had “fight the good fight” and a doxology. This week we have Paul’s final remarks to Timothy, with commands for rich people. Paul is very direct with people in the church, as doubtless this letter was read out in church, either in part or in full. When he says “command those who are rich” - he meant: tell them that this is what Jesus expects from you; there are no ifs or buts about this. Those who are rich in this present age are those who are rich now, but this begs the question whether they will be rich in the age to come. Riches in this present age are no guarantee of riches next year or at any time in the future. No one in central and eastern Europe had any inkling that the wealth they had before 1914 might have vanished because of raging inflation in the German and Austrian Empires six years later and been confiscated by the communists in the Russian Empire. The lives of luxury of the rich were swept away. The prosperity of the Roman world was shattered shortly after Augustine wrote his theological books in 400AD in some comfort in what seemed to be a peaceful North Africa. The lives of luxury of the rich were swept away when the Vandals pillaged and set alight the towns and villages thirty years later. In China fifty years of unrest ended with everyone being poor and many starving to death in the 1950s and 60s. Today many are wealthy in China, but that wealth could be confiscated at

any time a new regime emerges. More recently in the middle east, with the overthrow of the shah in Iran, with civil wars in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, the lives of luxury of the middle and upper classes were swept away. Those who place their faith in the wealth they have now may lose it all. If they do not place their faith in God they will have nothing when they die. Riches in the present age cannot buy a place in heaven. For over a thousand years the rich have been misled by false teachers to endow their wealth to the church to pay for prayers to be said forever to release them from an imaginary purgatory. Chantries are scattered throughout Britain where this was supposed to happen using the endowments made, and it all came to end in the middle of the sixteenth century when the past religious certainties were swept away by the Reformation. The lands that were endowed over many centuries to the Church were seized by the Crown and sold off. Elsewhere it says in the Bible that we should be content with what we have because God provides for our needs. Hebrews 13:5 *<sup>5</sup>Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'* Philippians 4:19 *<sup>19</sup>And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.*

None of us should put our trust in our wealth above our trust in God. Remember the rich young man who couldn't follow Jesus because he was too attached to his wealth. Remember the rich man who died and how he suffered in flames while the beggar Lazarus he ignored was in heaven.

So if we are wealthy we should use our wealth to share with those in real need as well as to support the church. God wants us to be cheerful givers. 2 Corinthians 9:7 *<sup>7</sup>Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. <sup>8</sup>And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.* Being a giver guards our hearts from materialism. If we do not give of our material things to the Lord's work, how will we be storing up a good foundation for the time to come? How will we lay hold on to eternal life? By being generous. *<sup>19</sup>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.*

I've been reading a book about the Puritans in the England when the country was mainly agricultural and there was little opportunity for anyone to become

wealthy other than through trade or some kind of manufacturing. The Protestant work ethic was something that set the Puritans apart from the majority of society, because they were strongly of the view that idleness was wicked and to be avoided. Being a farm worker on landed estates was very seasonal with long periods of idleness. There was no opportunity for other paid work so no incentive to be busy – taverns were numerous! Dutch visitors to England in the beginning of the seventeenth century commented on how lazy the English were compared to the people back home. The Protestant work ethic developed there sooner because of opportunities arising from overseas trade, shipping and manufacturing enabled people who didn't have land to become rich. The Puritans were usually men who had to work all week, except Sundays, and who were becoming wealthier as a result. Farm labourers and servants were all on fixed wages. When corn prices were low and bread was cheap, these people spent their excess money on drink, gambling and entertainment rather than investing in tools to make money doing something else in times when they were not required to work. The Puritans were making money and endowed money to pay for "lecturers" to preach the Gospel as the Anglican clergy rarely preached – they just read homilies and the prayer book in front of congregations. In addition when persecuted for criticising the Church and government, many went to America to populate the colonies there. What made the Puritans different was that they were able to share their wealth to provide livings for men who would preach the Gospel. That applies to us today. If we have no riches to share, and have barely enough for ourselves, we cannot fund those who preach the Gospel and depend on the support of individuals as they do God's work, whether here or overseas.

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Paul's final words to Timothy are personal, but apply to us all. In our present time, the distractions of the world are filled with godless chatter. The newspapers glorify the celebrities as they swap partners, luxuriate in hot spots and spend their lives in idleness. How much of our time is wasted? It's precious and once gone can never come back. In the world outside, truth is now called lies and lies are called truth. Knowledge is available everywhere yet is misused to advance whatever causes various sections of society believe are

important. Yet the most important knowledge available to mankind is neglected. The most important truth is avoided - the Good News of Jesus Christ. As in the early church those who showed some desire to follow Jesus have fallen away just as Jesus said in the Parable of the Sower. The temptations of the world are very strong as the easy wide path of selfishness and pleasure pulls so many away from God. Others question "did God really say that?" when faced with the choice between obeying commandments and disobeying them. As we see in John's Revelation of the state of the church in Ephesus, things had got pretty bad in a short time. *<sup>4</sup> Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.* (Rev 4:4-5). So the warning to us all is to repent, not to fall, keep on fighting the good fight, standing firm, and persevering to make Jesus known.

How can we help ourselves to stay faithful? Repent often, keeping short accounts with God; put on the full armour of God daily (Ephesians 6); Read our Bibles daily; Pray and listen; seek the Holy Spirit's guidance so that we are not taken in by falsehoods and worldliness; and keep meeting together.

Let's pray