

**God's Imprint on Our Lives**

October 18, 2020

**Matthew 22: 15-22**

*<sup>15</sup> Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. <sup>16</sup> So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. <sup>17</sup> Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?" <sup>18</sup> But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? <sup>19</sup> Show me the coin used for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. <sup>20</sup> Then he said to them, "Whose head is this, and whose title?" <sup>21</sup> They answered, "The emperor's." Then he said to them, "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's." <sup>22</sup> When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.*

**1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1: 1-10**

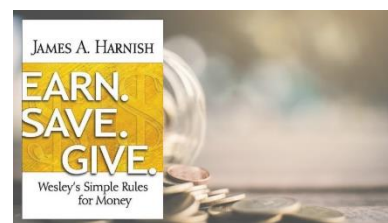
*<sup>1</sup> To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. <sup>2</sup> We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly <sup>3</sup> remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> And you*

*became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup> so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup> For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. <sup>9</sup> For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead — Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming.*



Good morning! Welcome to week three of our “Thriving” sermon series. To date we have taken aim at the harvest – at making disciples for the transformation of the world – and at building a foundation as we continue to journey with one another and with Christ. Today we delve into how this journey leaves us marked with God’s imprint upon our hearts and souls. Today we home in on the idea that Christian generosity or stewardship is less about what we give than it is about who and whose we are. As we begin, let us pray...

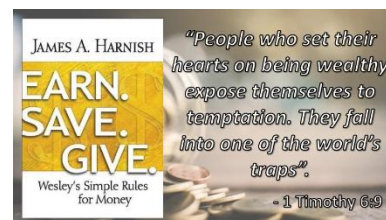
Chapter three in this little book that I have been drawing from during this sermon series is titled “Save All You Can”. As the chapter opens, author James Harnish



acknowledges that this principle is “simple to state and difficult to do, in large part because it goes against the grain of the culture in which we live”. The Bible has many warnings about the danger of chasing after wealth. No so the world.

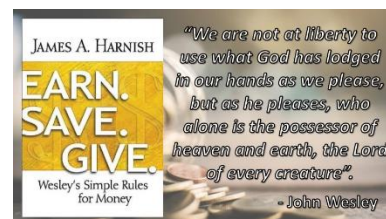
Paul warns Timothy, his young protégé, in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6 with these words:

*"People who set their hearts on being wealthy expose themselves to temptation. They fall into one of the world's traps".* While we know the truth of these Biblical words, we also know the truth of these real life words



attributed to Samuel Clemens, also known as Mark Twain: "I am opposed to millionaires, but it would be dangerous to offer me the position". Wealth and the accumulation of money can easily draw us in and have a negative effect on our lives. Yet, wealth or money also has the power to do great good in the world. We have touched on that idea the past two Sundays.

Harnish uses the vineyard as an analogy for our wealth. A vineyard is first and foremost a long-term investment. Back in 2008 I planted seven grape vines along the edge of the hill at the bottom of our yard in Rapid City. I planted three different varieties of grapes specifically developed for South Dakota's climate. When I planted the grapes, I knew that it would be several years until the vines produced enough grapes to make wine production possible. Year after year I tended the vines – pruning, fertilizing, watering, netting the early fruit to protect it from the birds. The plants matured and year by year the eventual harvest became clearer and clearer in my mind. Patience is the first key to making wise choices in our effort to save all we can. The second is being a good steward – caring well for that which we are entrusted. In his sermon, "The Good Steward", John Wesley spoke these words concerning our role as stewards of God's blessings: *"We are not at liberty to use what God has lodged in our hands as we please,*

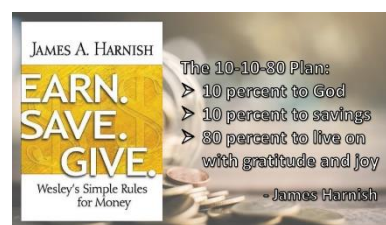


*but as he pleases, who alone is the possessor of heaven and earth, and the Lord of every creature".* Here Wesley is connecting to the long-held Christian belief that everything we are and all we have are gifts from God. This belief holds that we are simply stewards of the things that our extravagantly generous God has placed in our hands. We are entrusted to use these things in ways that satisfy God's good intentions, not just our own. For Wesley, just as the way we earned our money was a matter of great significance, how we cared for these things also mattered a great deal. Wesley taught often on "prudence" – a term not widely used today.

The root of this word comes from the Latin word '*prudens*' – meaning "far-sighted". Wesley believed in making wise decisions about the way we use our money now so that it will better provide for us in the future. We used to be a nation of savers – of people who carefully laid away resources to one day be able to have those things we wanted or, in some cases, needed. Today the common belief is that we can have whatever we want whenever we want it. Many people live constantly under the oppressive weight of credit card debt. Our immediate gratification culture has enslaved many to their money, or, more specifically, to their lack thereof. Standing counter this socially accepted norm is the practice of frugality. Wesley was a very frugal man. Although he would have been considered wealthy by the day's standards, Wesley was also one of the most generous and kind men in his day. For him, frugality meant using what he was blessed with wisely and well to accomplish its bet's purposes. Wesley was also greatly contented. As research has shown, money does not buy happiness. Many of us have learned this lesson the hard way. For those who have found freedom from money, what I close with from chapter three will make perfect

sense. When we are free from debt, we are freed to be generous. We will even see that God takes what we offer and he multiplies it to bless others and to bring us joy. Chapter three closes with the 10-10-80 plan. This principle is also “simple to state and difficult to do, in large part because it goes against the grain of the culture in which we live”. The Bible is filled with words concerning money. It may come as a surprise to many of you that most of what the Bible teaches about money is not focused on supporting the church. The main focus is on saving our souls. Throughout the scriptures the emphasis in teachings on money is to focus us on a deeper relationship with God. Here is the 10-10-80 plan, straight and simple:

- ✝ 10 percent to God
- ✝ 10 percent to savings
- ✝ 80 percent to live on with gratitude and joy



The first is commonly called a “tithe” – ten percent given back to God. To tithe is to practice an act of spiritual discipline that allows us to “organize our lives and our resources around our commitment to Christ”. To tithe is an act of trust. Let me offer two asides here. First, some of us may desire to follow this plan but are unable to right now because of the financial commitments that we have made in the past. Tithing is the goal. It should be for all of us. Second, if you want to know if it can work to give your first fruits to God, trusting in him to provide the rest, come and see me. I would love to share some stories with you. The second part of the plan is about being far-sighted. Faithfully setting aside this portion allows us to meet both the expected and unexpected needs of the future.

The last part of the plan, living on 80% is not always easy or convenient, especially as we begin. Like the rest of the plan, it calls for us to reorient and reorganize our lives to the values of God's kingdom. To delve into that concept, we turn to Matthew 22, verses fifteen through 22.



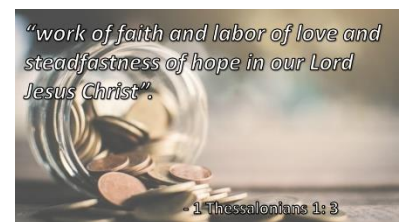
In the opening verse of our gospel lesson we learn that the religious leaders are out to trap Jesus. After buttering him up – *"we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality"* – they pose a political and religious question. At first thought, it would be a question whose answer must surely offend one side or the other, if not both! Stamped right on the coin were these words: "Tiberius Caesar: son of the divine Augustus, high priest". The religious leaders ask Jesus, *"It is lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?"* With the words that were stamped on the coin, this was a landmine of a question for Jesus. Jesus immediately addresses their motives, asking, *"Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites?"* Then he asks for a coin. It would have looked like this coin. Jesus, in turn, asks a simple question: *"Whose head is this, and whose title?"* After replying that both are the emperor's, Jesus instructs them, *"Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's"*. Amazed at his answer, they leave him, going away to formulate another plan of attack.

Just as the coin pictured on the screen would belong to Caesar because it bore his image, we can follow Jesus' logic to the conclusion that we belong to God because we are created in the image of God. We – every part of us – is created in the image of the divine God. God's fingerprints are all over us. Do you believe it? It is true! Take a few seconds right now, turn to your left, and say to that person, "You are made in the image of God". Now, turn to the person on your right and say, "You are made in the image of God".

Shaped in his image, formed day by day, made more and more into the image of his son, we have God's imprints on our lives. All of us – all of who we are and what we are and what we have – belongs to God alone. Yet, even as we acknowledged at the beginning of today's message, living into this truth can be difficult in today's culture. There is much in the world and in our culture that tugs at our faithfulness. Ultimately, though, we are members of the family of God, called to live a holy and sacred life. We are made to honor God through our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. When we live this way, we find a life of joy and contentment as our reward.

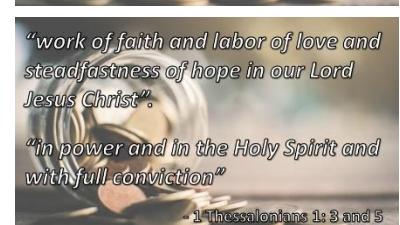


Turning to our passage from 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, we see what a life lived in the faith looks like. Paul rejoices and gives thanks for their *"work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ"*. He goes on to celebrate how the gospel is being lived out in *"in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"*.



*"work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ"*

- 1 Thessalonians 1: 3



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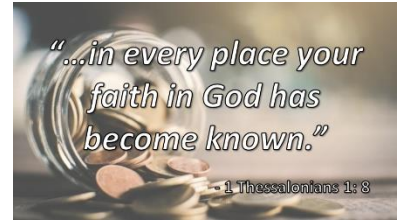
*"in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction"*

- 1 Thessalonians 1: 3 and 5



God's imprint is readily evident in their lives. Of the church in Thessalonica, Paul writes: *"in every place your faith in God has become known"*. What a great thing that would be to hear!

Imagine if up and down the valley, that was the word on the street about Grace United Methodist Church.



Imagine if in your neighborhood, at your workplace, or in your school – that *"in every place your faith in God has become known"*. What would it take for every one of us to live with God's imprint clearly visible in our lives, all the time, so that this statement was really true?



Paul answers this question in verses nine and ten. These Thessalonians were living in the same unjust, oppressive system that the first Christians were living in. Some

would argue that we are living in an unjust, oppressive system today. In verses nine and ten we read about the marks evident in a people with God's imprint clearly upon them. First, they extended a kind of welcoming that was noticeable. Citizens of the world noticed the radical welcome that these citizens of heaven extended to those who were broken and lost and hurting. The second way that God's imprint was evident upon their lives was the way they *"turned to God from idols"*. They were not living for the things of the world any longer. Instead they were striving to *"serve a living and true God"*. In verse ten Paul turns to the source of their joy and contentment. Here, in verse ten, Paul writes, about how the Thessalonians are choosing to *"wait for his Son from heaven"*, the one who will rescue them from *"the wrath that is coming"*. That wrath will come when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead, when Jesus asks each of us, "Did you know me"? The evidence will be God's imprint upon our lives.



There is a song popular on Christian radio right now called "Truth Be Told" by Matthew West. It is a powerful song. The song begins with the first two lies that we often tell ourselves. The first lie is that we have it all together and the second lie is that we are all perfect. The chorus admits that although we say we are "fine", we are really not fine. The church in Thessalonica opened its door wide open to those who were hurting and broken, who were in need of the gospel's truth. They had turned from living the lies of the world and were eager to help others know the Savior, the source of their salvation and joy. As we seek to answer our call to make a difference in the valley and to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, we must likewise open our doors.

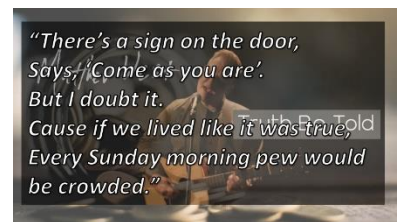


Please listen to this section from Matthew West's song, "Truth Be Told". This will be the chorus and verse two...

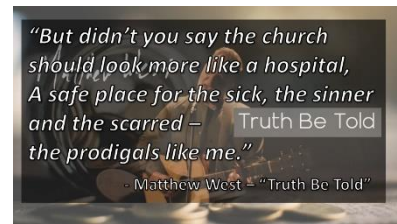


Here are the words to verse two, so that we can chew on them a little bit this morning as we consider how God's imprint on our lives should lead us to be generous with what God has already blessed us with. Here are the verse lyrics:

*There's a sign on the door,  
Says, "Come as you are"  
But I doubt it.  
'Cause if we lived like it was true,  
Every Sunday morning pew would be crowded.*



*But didn't you say the church  
should look more like a hospital,  
A safe place for the sick, the sinner  
and the scarred –  
the prodigals like me.*



As was the case for the people in the gospel of Matthew, we live in taxing times, in trying times. People all over are experiencing constant threats of poverty or racism and many are living paycheck to paycheck. We cannot solve all of these issues. We cannot exorcise all the pain of the day. But we can use what God has given us to make a positive difference in the lives of those around us.



In Thessalonians 1, we hear of the example of what a church living faithfully in the world looks like. The power of Christian community was standing in the gap, opposing the power of the empire and of the world. The sign on their door said, "Come as you are". It was being truly lived out. They were imitators of the Lord Jesus Christ. They lived with a joy inspired and fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit. One and all came into that church to experience God's transforming power. It was evident in the life of the members of that church and soon the sick, the sinner, the scarred, and the prodigals would also bear God's imprint upon their lives.

This morning I close with two questions: First, does your life bear the imprint of God? Does it? Would the world around you answer the same way? And second, what are you actively doing to help others to have God's imprint upon their lives? Would your neighbors verify your answer? Let us pray...

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. What is one intentional thing that you could do to more fully be one of whom people say, "*in every place your faith in God has become known*"?
- 2) *Pray*. In what ways is God's imprint evident in your life? Spend some time in reflective prayer, seeking to be used by God more and more.
- 3) *Study*. Read 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2: 5-8. How can you 'gently' and 'tenderly' care for those in need of a Savior in your area of the community?