

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost – Epistle

“Suckered? or Succored? What’s My Life?”

1 Timothy 6:6-19

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Analysis by Marcus Felde

For Bob, Who Has a Great Curve! (You Got Good—Now Get Well!)

From One of Bob’s Many Timothies.

1 Timothy 6: 6 Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; 7 for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; 8 but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. 9 But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.

11 But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you 14 to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which he will bring about at the right time – he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. 16 It is he

alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen. 17 As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, 19 thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

Introduction: This pericope compares and contrasts two life curves. The first parabola begins as a climb toward riches, then plunges to “We take nothing out of [the world]” (v. 7). The Christ parabola inverts this, descending through privation and struggle as we fight the good fight (v. 12). However, we swoop up in the end as we “take hold of the life that really is life” (v. 19, what a cool phrase!).

DIAGNOSIS: “Suckered”

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – “Haughty”

Timothy gets warned, and we who count ourselves “people of God” are likewise cautioned, against spending life in a trivial pursuit of wealth. The characteristic naughtiness of the rich: haughtiness (v. 17). Acting superior to others. You don’t want to be like that. Huh uh.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – “Wandering”

If we scratch the surface of the naughty haughty, we find they have “set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches” (v. 17). Mammon becomes the master people cleave to, rather than Christ. “Trapped by many senseless and harmful desires” (v. 9), addicted to stupid and destructive behaviors, “they wander away from the

faith" (v. 10). Uh oh.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – “Pierced”

Did they do it to themselves? Have they “pierced themselves with many pains” (v. 10)? Was it the fault of desires that “plunged them into ruin and destruction” (v. 9)? Perhaps it was simply a case of having both hands otherwise engaged, when “the life that really is life” was offered? Say “all of the above.” God, who created a world into which we brought nothing, also demands that we take nothing out. Except by his gift. When this life is over, those who lived for this life are done. Suckered by an illusory hope, they will have only gone around once. Hah!

PROGNOSIS: “Succored”

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – “Pierced, Too”

But there is another who was pierced. Another made the good confession in the presence of Pontius Pilate (v. 13). An other who also, by the way, shunned “all this” (e.g., the love of money, v. 11). He is present now to Timothy (v. 15), and is guarantor by his blood that Timothy (and we) will have a real life. (And look at him now, dwelling in unapproachable light! Rich much!) Christ conquers death, with the mother of all succor punches. Heh, heh!

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – “Confessing”

Timothy and we make the good confession out of hearts that are fixed on nothing so “uncertain” as the physical world (i.e., money, v. 17), but rather on a promise of something more lasting: Life. (The eternal sort.) It’s a fight, but a “good fight.” The confession is at first a sort of “taking hold” but, finally, a seizing of the right object (vv. 12, 19). Aha!

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – “Generous”

Out of such a heart, even those who happen in the course of events to be rich in this world can produce something truly

rich, if they are generous in providing aid (succor) to others. For if "sin" means to be "curved in on self " (incurvatus in se), those who are godly are curved outward, toward others. "A good foundation for the future" (v. 19) is constructed not by acquiring but by sharing. Ho, ho, ho!