I am holding in my hand a mouse trap. Did you ever have to set one of these things to capture the mouse that had invaded your garage or even your home? First you need to put some bait on the trap such as a little cheese or even better some delicious peanut butter. Then you set the trap so the trigger will release quickly when the mouse touches the food with its nose. Quicker than you can blink an eye the trap snaps shut and the mouse is gone.

Satan is always setting traps for Christians. One of his best baits is actually a blessing which the Lord gives us, the blessing of money. He is very good at using money to trap people who have large amounts of money, people who have very little, or just ordinary folks who are somewhere in between.

It won’t be easy to avoid the traps that Satan sets by using money. In fact it will be a fight as Paul says, “Fight the good fight of faith.” How do we win this fight? God’s Word encourages us to treasure the riches of the kingdom of Christ more than the riches this world offers.

It is not wrong to have lots of money. Money is a gift from God. It is wrong to love money so much that it takes us away from loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind. Listen to these words of Paul. “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.” It makes you happy when some stock you have gains in value, or you see the value of your home go up. But an even more important gain or growth in your life is this “godliness with contentment.”

Godliness is living your live for the Lord and close to the Lord because he has been so good to you. Paul uses that word several times in the two letters he wrote to Timothy. Paul had this joy and contentment in living a godly life. He wrote while he was a prisoner in Rome, “For I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty. Then he wrote, “I can do all things through him who gives me strength.” The Lord is so powerful and so strong that he can make you happy and content in him even when everything is taken from you.

When Job lost everything he was able to say, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord.” It was the prophet Habakkuk who was given strength from the Lord to say, “Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and fields produce nothing good, though there are no sheep in the pen and cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.” Habakkuk then gives all glory to God with the words, “The Lord God is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me to go on the heights.” Have you ever met people who seem to be so happy in the Lord, like deer running up to the heights, even though they have little money?

How different when money controls our life to such an extent that it robs us of our joy in the Lord and the blessings he has for us. “People who want to be rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.” There is nothing wrong with wanting to be rich and have money as long as the money does not become a root of evil in our lives, or lead us into foolish and harmful desires that plunge us into ruin and destruction.
Andrew Jackson Whitaker pulled up to a convenience store to put fuel into his big black Lincoln Navigator. It was there in Hurricane, West Virginia that he bought a Powerball lottery ticket that won him 315 million dollars. Of course he took it in lump sum payment of 93 million after taxes and immediately gave 10% to his church and another 17 million to a foundation to feed the homeless. After that is was all downhill. He was arrested for drunken driving and assault in a so-called gentleman’s club, his wife left him, and his granddaughter Brandi whom he lavished with a 2000 per week allowance died of an overdose of drugs. Sometime ago in an interview he said that he wish he had lost the ticket and never cashed it in.

We can easily see how money messed up the life of Jack Whittaker, or in our gospel lesson today, the rich man. The rich man was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. He wouldn’t think of using his money to offer food to a poor man named Lazarus who begged at his gate. The rich man was so absorbed in what his riches could buy he had little time for God. After he died and was buried he found himself in the torments of hell. You don’t have to drive to the expensive homes at Jupiter Island to find people who value their riches more than God. Just drive through your neighborhood. People are enjoying the blessings that money gives them without honoring the God who gave them these blessings.

What about a more careful look into our own lives? Remember when you were bitter because others had more than you did. The root of evil was there. Remember when you were jealous because your brother who was not as smart as you in school landed a better job than you did. The root of evil was there. Remember when you lost money in an investment. How angry you were! Remember when you bought a lottery ticket and actually prayed that you might win. Remember that fight you had in your marriage over the use of money! Remember the battle that some kids had over the inheritance of their parents! Satan loves to set traps for us that involve money.

All of us struggle with a love for money. We know that we will someday have to leave everything behind, but we still have a desire to pile things up for ourselves. We all want to get rich, even though God tells us right here that this attitude will only get us into trouble.

When God looks into our hearts, what he hopes to see is contentment and love for Christ. But all to often what God sees instead is our love for money, our greed, our desire to be rich. All of us have sinned in the eyes of God. All of us have fallen short of God’s glory.

And yet, even though we deserve to be punished by God, what happens instead? God sends his Son, doesn’t he? When Christ came into the world, he was thinking about something more important than money – he was thinking about you. We are all impressed when we hear about someone’s net worth – but have you ever considered the net worth of the Son of God? How much do you think that would be? Trillions? And yet, Jesus put it all aside, for you. He had you in mind when he was lying in a feeding trough in a barn. He had you in mind when he wandered the countryside, preaching the Word, without a place to sleep. He had you in mind when he was arrested and beaten and finally crucified.

Jesus gave up everything, so that you could be rich spiritually, so that you could be forgiven of all of your sins and have the gift of eternal life. We all check our bank accounts from time to time to make sure that we’re not going into the red. Do you realize
that you have an “off-shore” bank account, something that no one has access to you but you? It’s your spiritual bank account. Have you checked your balance lately? Do you realize just how rich you really are?

You have the forgiveness of sins in your spiritual bank account, and that is worth far more than having million dollars in your earthly bank account. And not only do you have the forgiveness of sins. You also have in your spiritual bank account a guarantee that you have eternal life. You also have God’s promise that he will take care of all of your physical needs on this earth. You also have peace and confidence that come from knowing what will happen to you when you die. You have all these things in your spiritual bank account right now. And that is what makes you rich, not in the world’s eyes, but in God’s eyes, and really, those are the only eyes that count.

“But you man of God, flee from all of this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.” People talk about “pursuing a career.” Jesus has the ultimate career for you. He has taken you out of the kingdom of darkness and brought you into the kingdom of his love. “Christ has redeemed me a lost and condemned creature, not with gold and silver but with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death... that I should be his own and live under him in his kingdom.” Instead of joining the herd and running after money, you are members of Jesus’ kingdom. You enjoy pursuing higher things in life such as righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

We are told to “fight the good fight of faith.” I know it is a battle to stay away from the greed that can pop up when we have to deal with money. You have the Lord on your side. “God is our Refuge and Strength.” Just as David was able to kill the giant Goliath with a smooth stone from the brook, you are able to kill the giants that attack you, including this monster of an unwholesome love for money.

We are further told to “take hold of eternal life to which you were called when you made your confession of faith.” We can witness the way Jesus did when he stood before Pontius Pilate and said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Money cannot buy me membership in God’s kingdom and give me one second of eternal life. The debt of sin is far too great, including the debts that come with bad thoughts about money. Jesus offers us membership in his kingdom with his blood that was shed for us. He offers it free of charge. It allows us to live in the place he has prepared for us. The Revelation describes heaven as a place where the streets are paved with gold. It is a way of describing eternal life with Jesus as far more valuable than any money or riches in this life.

Only Jesus can keep us faithful to the end. He has riches for us that go beyond anything money can buy. He is “the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.” This King of kings and Lord of lords gives us the treasures of his kingdom, the treasures of his love in this life and for all eternity. Treasure these treasures and you will have the strength to enjoy the money the Lord gives you without letting it destroy you. Amen