

Enough: When Dreams Become Nightmares

1 Timothy 6:6-19

October 2, 2011

I. The American Dream.

What are your dreams in life? As children we all had dreams of what we wanted to grow up and become: a fireman, policeman, nurse, superhero. As adults our dreams took different shapes and forms from our childhood ones. Our dream may be to have a lasting impact on our world in some way: maybe to discover a cure for cancer, or work to end world hunger. Our dream may be as simple as succeeding in our profession, having a family, a nice home and comfortable life.

A phrase we often hear at election times of the year is The American Dream, meaning this is the basic dream that all people in America are striving for. What is the American Dream? Wikipedia says The American Dream is a national ethos of the United States in which freedom includes a promise of the possibility of prosperity and success. In his 1931 book, The Epic of America, James Truslow Adams describes the American Dream in this way: "life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement" regardless of social class or circumstances

of birth.” Wikipedia goes on to say that the idea of the American Dream is rooted in the United States Declaration of Independence which proclaims that "all people are created equal" and that they are "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights" including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

This sounds like a good principle to have, but what does the American Dream look like in a tangible way?

Most of the time when we refer to the American Dream, we are talking about our material possessions which include a successful job that pays well, a nice home, and a

good car to drive. Around the founding of our nation, the American Dream meant being able to afford land to have a farm. Today the dream is still roughly the same idea. We want a successful life where we have a good paying job, own our own home on our own piece of property, and have a relatively comfortable lifestyle. The American Dream is often measured by what we can gain and the stuff we possess.

II. The American Nightmare.

If we are not careful, the American Dream can become the American Nightmare. Alex de Tocqueville (de

Tokeville), a political philosopher who came to the US in the 19th Century, made this observation about Americans.

“They are extremely eager in the pursuit of immediate material pleasures and are always discontented with the position that they occupy. They think about nothing but ways of changing their lot and bettering it. For people in this frame of mind every new way of getting wealth more quickly, every machine which lessens work, every means of diminishing the cost of production, every invention which makes pleasures easier or greater, seems the most magnificent accomplishment of the human mind. One

usually finds that the love of money is either the chief or secondary motive at the bottom of everything Americans do.”

If we are not careful, we become obsessed with consuming, acquiring and buying more and more things.

If we aren't able to control our consumption and desire for more and bigger things then we can easily find ourselves

in over our heads and the American Dream will become

the American nightmare. We often suffer from two

diseases that cause us to experience the American

nightmare: Affluenza and Credit-itis. Affluenza is the

constant need for more and bigger and better stuff while Credit-itis feeds our desire for instant gratification. We can have whatever we want now. These diseases affect me and I realize how much they do each time I get a new appointment and we move. As I start packing our things up, I wonder how in the world we accumulated so much stuff. The worst of it is that we hardly use half of the stuff that we have, but we pack it up anyway. It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing the next handy tool or gadget that would make life easier, or that nice piece of clothing that

we would look great in and feeling we must have it now.

How have we made it all along without it?

We suffer from these diseases of Affluenza and Credit-itis and before we know it, the American Dream has become the American Nightmare. We are overwhelmed with loans and debt. We struggle each month to pay our bills. We become overwhelmed with worry and stress. We find ourselves constantly arguing with our spouse over money. We are unable to do some of the things we want to do because we can't afford to.

III. The Deeper Problem Within.

The American Nightmare and diseases of Affluenza and Credit-itis stem from a spiritual issue that we all have. We were originally created in God's image, but that image has become distorted and we have been infected with a condition called sin. Sin has affected us and caused our desire for God to be directed toward possessions. Instead of trusting God to take care of us, we place our hope and security in accumulating wealth. Rather than having an attitude of generosity toward others, we become selfish and our primary motive is taking care of our own selves and needs. Sin causes us to try to fill the emptiness of our

lives with possessions rather than God. So we continue to be unsatisfied with our lives and keep consuming more and more.

There is nothing wrong with having money and buying nice things. The problem is when we become consumed with it to the point that it drives us and becomes the central focus of our lives. Satan will take something good and tempt us in a way that it leads us away from the life God intended us to live. He used a piece of fruit to tempt Adam and Eve and it brought sin into the world. He tried to tempt Jesus on three occasions and if Jesus gave in,

our opportunity for salvation and new life would have been affected. In John 10:10 Jesus said “The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy. I came that you may have life and have it abundantly.

IV. Pursue Godliness with Contentment.

In this morning’s scripture lesson, Paul teaches his student Timothy how to live a godly life and experience the abundant life Jesus came to give. He says “There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment” (v. 6). Paul then unpacks this by challenging the perception that possessions are a means to happiness.

First, Paul says that our possessions are temporary and fleeting. All of our stuff stays here (v. 7). Hearses don't tow U-Haul trailers, so you can't take any of your wealth with you.

We have to remember that our soul was never designed to be satisfied by what is temporary. Any thing we crave today will be obsolete at some point. Jesus teaches us to "store up treasure in heaven". This is what we do when we consider how our money can fund those things which have eternal impact.

Second, *Paul begs us to consider our wants as opposed to our needs. We need food and clothing (v. 8). We may want (v. 9) many other things which can lead to temptation and sin (v. 10). The goal is to be content with our needs and not order our lives around all of our wants. Consider Maslow's famed hierarchy of needs. It moves from basic human physiological needs (food and shelter) to more advanced emotional ones such as self-esteem, respect and creativity. While a BMW is a nice dream car, it doesn't make any of Maslow's levels of needs, much less Paul's.*

In terms of godliness with respect to money and possessions, Paul says pursue your needs, but not all of your wants. To that end, we need to audit our stuff and our spending.

Third, Paul sets loving money against godly contentment. Money is a tool to use to help buy what we need and to serve God with, but gaining it is not to be the focus of our lives. Jesus said you cannot serve both God and money. You will either hate one and love the other.

Contentment is a trait that carries with it the notion of sufficiency or “enoughness.” It implies satisfaction. Paul

teaches that being content is a spiritual discipline:

“Timothy, in the face of a culture of money lovers, choose to be content. Choose sufficiency. Choose satisfaction.

Choose ‘enoughness.’”

In closing I would like to show a video of a family that went from a life of living the American Dream that became a Nightmare to a life of contentment.

Bluefish Video: Financial Worries of Raising Family

Financial simplicity allows one to avoid certain life discomforts: senseless and harmful desires, ruin, destruction, unnecessary worry and stress caused by

overwhelming debt. Financial simplicity also carries several positive characteristics in our text: great gain, rich provision, enjoyment and a good future foundation.

God has designed us to be satisfied with godliness and not greediness. The love of money is a love that makes a promise it can't keep. We've been designed for contentment. When we develop the spiritual discipline of contentment in our lives, we experience the life of freedom, abundance and joy that Jesus came to give.

Amen.

(Source: Homiletics, Enough)