

THE VANITY OF LIFE

ECCLESIASTICS 5:8-20

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KEY PHRASE

- A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH MONEY
- LOVE OF MONEY
- WISDOM ABOUT WEALTH

Solomon left the temple and went to the city hall where he again witnessed corrupt politicians oppressing the poor (**3:16-17; 4:1-3**). The government officials violated the law by using their authority to help themselves and not to serve others, a practice condemned by Moses (**Lev. 19:15; Deut 24:17**).

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Solomon speaks on the **corrupt bureaucracy**. The king in the ancient Near East was required to protect the legal rights of his people. The royal bureaucracy was thus responsible for justice and righteousness. Too often, however, reality was much harsher. By the time everyone (local officials all the way up to the temple and palace) got their share of the farmer's crop (in the form of produce taxation), bare subsistence was all that was possible.

The *New International Version* translation of verse 8 gives a vivid description of the situation: "*One official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still.*" Instead of the poor man getting a fair hearing, "*the matter is lost in red tape and bureaucracy*" (v. 8, TLB), and the various officials pocket the money that should have gone to the innocent poor man.

Verse 9; The general idea seems to be that in spite of corruption in the bureaucracy, it is better to have organized government, and a king over the land, than to have

anarchy. A few dishonest people may profit from corrupt practices, but *everybody* benefits from organized authority.

Of course, the ideal is to have a government that is both honest and efficient, but man's heart being what it is, the temptation to dishonest gain is always there. Solomon had already discussed "*the futility of wealth*" in 2:1-11, and some of those ideas are repeated here. What he did in this section was demolish several of the myths that people hold about wealth. Because they hold to these illusions, they rob themselves of the blessings God has for them.

V. 10 - Some people treat money as though it were a god. They love it, make sacrifices for it, and think that it can do anything. Their minds are filled with thoughts about it; their lives are controlled by getting it and guarding it; and when they have it, they experience a great sense of security. What faith in the Lord does for the Christian, money does for many unbelievers. How often we hear people say, "*Well, money may not be the number one thing in life, but it's way ahead of whatever is number two!*"

The person who loves money cannot be satisfied no matter how much is in the bank account — because the human heart was made to be satisfied only by God (3:11). "*Take heed and beware of covetousness,*" warned Jesus, "*for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses*" (**Luke 12:15**, NKJV).

First the person loves money, and then he loves *more* money, and the disappointing pursuit has begun that can lead to all sorts of problems. "*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil*" (**1 Tim 6:10**, NKJV).

Vers. 10, 11. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver. --*The unsatisfactoriness of material wealth:* - That as GOODS INCREASE, DESIRE INCREASES. This is not the case universally. There are men whose property is daily increasing, but whose desires are not increasing. The answer, as to who these men are, is suggested by the text.

They are those who have not set their affections upon money. Love of silver leads to dissatisfaction with silver. Love of abundance leads to dissatisfaction with increase. He who loves silver wants gold. He who loves gold wants land. "*Man never is, but always to be blessed,*" if he look for blessedness only to earth.

As bodily hunger cannot be satisfied by fine scenery which appeals to the eye; as thirst cannot be quenched by the strains of even the sweetest music; and as what ministers to mental growth will not, directly at least, tend to physical development; so neither can the soul thrive upon food other than its own. God made man for Himself, and away from God, there is for man no abiding, no solid satisfaction.

THAT EXPENDITURE KEEPS PACE WITH INCOME. Wants are born of "goods." These increase and so do those who eat them. Further, wealth has its duties as well as its advantages; and in its possessor be a Christian he will recognize those duties. The practical recognition of them proves this, that "when goods are increased they are increased that eat them."

That the LOVE OF WEALTH IS VANITY. "This also is vanity." To love wealth "is vanity": because love of wealth makes men cold, unsympathetic, and morally unmanly, causes them to live from circumference to centre, instead of from centre to circumference. On the contrary he who lives for others lives a radiating life, realizes that all are brethren.

To love wealth is vanity, because whilst there is an excitement in the pursuit of wealth there is no true enjoyment in its" possession. A soul centred upon worldly wealth, like the daughter of the horse-leech, cries, "*Give! give!*" We cannot serve God and mammon.

MONEY SOLVES EVERY PROBLEM (V. 11).

There is no escaping the fact that we need a certain amount of money in order to live in this world, but money *of itself* is not the magic "cure-all" for every problem. In fact, an increase in wealth usually creates new problems that we never even knew existed before.

Solomon mentioned one: relatives and friends start showing up and enjoying our hospitality. All we can do is watch them eat up our wealth. Or perhaps it is the tax agent who visits us and decides that we owe the government more money.

1. *The vanity of riches:* -- This passage describes the vanity of riches. With the enjoyments Of frugal industry it contrasts the woes of wealth. Looking up from that condition on which Solomon looked down, it may help to reconcile us to our lot, if we remember how the most opulent of princes envied it.
2. When a man begins to amass money, he begins to feed an appetite which nothing can appease, and which its proper food will only render fiercer. "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver." To greed there may be "*increase,*" but no increase can ever be "abundance." Therefore, happy they who have never got enough to awaken the accumulating passion, and who, feeling that food and raiment are the utmost to which they can aspire, are therewith content.
3. It should reconcile us to the want of wealth, that, as abundance grows, so grow the consumers, and of riches less perishable, the proprietor enjoys no more than the mere spectator. A rich man buys a picture or a statue, and he is proud to think that his mansion is adorned with such a famous masterpiece. But a poor man comes and looks at it, and, because he has the aesthetic

insight, in a few minutes he is conscious of more astonishment and pleasure than the dull proprietor has experienced in half a century.

4. Amongst the pleasures of obscurity, or rather of occupation, the next noticed is sound slumber. Sometimes the wealthy would be the better for a taste of poverty; it would reveal to them their privileges. But if the poor could get a taste of opulence, it would reveal to them strange luxuries in lowliness. Fevered with late hours and false excitement, or scared by visions the righteous recompense of gluttonous excess, or with breath suppressed and palpitating heart listing the fancied footsteps of the robber, grandeur often pays a nightly penance for the triumph of the day.
5. Wealth is often the ruin of its possessor. It is "kept for the owner to his hurt." Like that King of Cyprus who made himself so rich that he became a tempting spoil, and who, rather than lose his treasures, embarked them in perforated ships; but, wanting courage to draw the plugs, ventured back to land and lost both his money and his life: so a fortune is a great perplexity to its owner, and is no defence in times of danger. And very often, by enabling him to procure all that heart can wish, it pierces him through with many sorrows. Ministering to the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, misdirected opulence has ruined many both in soul and body.
6. mNor is it a small vexation to have accumulated a fortune, and when expecting to transmit it to some favourite child, to find it suddenly swept away (vers. 14-16). There is now the son, but where is the sumptuous mansion? Here is the heir, but where is the vaunted heritage?

Silver and satisfaction: -- This is true of all earthly things. No man is satisfied with any human idol.

- I. CORRUPT AFFECTION. All worldly love is corrupt. There is nothing good in silver. It has only present beauty and usefulness
- II. THE GLAMOUR OF TIME. How bright is the tinsel of an illuminated theatre! Such is the spell cast over the things of time and sense, until the Spirit of God causes the sunshine to beam in our hearts.
- III. THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF AMBITION. Like a mirage the object sought eludes the grasp. No acquisition is final. The more we get the more we want.

WEALTH BRINGS PEACE OF MIND (V. 12).

The late Joe Louis, world heavyweight boxing champion, used to say, "I don't like money actually, but it quiets my nerves." But Solomon said that possessing wealth is no guarantee that your nerves will be calm and your sleep sound. According to him, the common laborer sleeps better than the rich man. The suggestion seems to be that the rich man ate too much and was kept awake all night by an upset stomach. But surely Solomon had something greater in mind than that. *The Living*

Bible expresses verse 12 perfectly: "The man who works hard sleeps well whether he eats little or much, but the rich must worry and suffer insomnia." Yes, it's good to have the things that money can buy, provided you don't lose the things that money can't buy.

More than one preacher has mentioned John D. Rockefeller in his sermons as an example of a man whose life was almost ruined by wealth. At the age of fifty-three, Rockefeller was the world's only billionaire, earning about a million dollars a week. But he was a sick man who lived on crackers and milk and could not sleep because of worry. When he started giving his money away, his health changed radically and he lived to celebrate his ninety-eighth birthday!

WEALTH PROVIDES SECURITY (VV. 13-17).

The picture here is of two rich men. One hoarded all his wealth and ruined himself by becoming a miser. The other man made some unsound investments and lost his wealth. He was right back where he started from and had no estate to leave to his son. He spent the rest of his days in the darkness of discouragement and defeat, and he did not enjoy life. Like all of us, he brought nothing into the world at birth, and he took nothing out of the world at death (see ***Job 1:21; Ps 49:17; 1 Tim 6:7***).

This account makes us think of our Lord's parable about the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-21). The man thought all his problems were solved when he became rich, but immediately he was faced with providing bigger barns for his wealth. He thought he was safe and secure for years to come, but that night he died! His money provided no security whatsoever. Keep in mind that Solomon was advocating neither poverty nor riches, because both have their problems (***Prov 30:7-9***). The Preacher was warning his listeners against the love of money and the delusions that wealth can bring.

5:17. - **eating in darkness.** If one works in the fields from sunup till sundown, then both breakfast and supper are eaten in the dark. Thus those who desire wealth will not have fulfillment. Solomon gave us this wise counsel before in ***2:24; 3:12-13***, and ***3:22***, and he will repeat it at least three more times before he ends his "sermon."

THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO GET WEALTH:

we can work for it, we can steal it, or we can receive it as a gift (see *Eph 4:28*). In the closing verses of the chapter (vv. 18-20), he affirmed once again the importance of accepting our station in life and enjoying the blessings that God gives to us. The thing that is "good and fitting" (v. 18, NKJV) is to labor faithfully, enjoy the good things of life, and accept it all as the gracious gift of God.

Solomon saw the blessings of life as God's gift to those who work and who accept that work as the favor of God. "To enjoy your work and to accept your lot in life — that is indeed a gift from God" (v. 19, TLB).

Verse 20 mean that the person who rejoices in God's daily blessings will never have regrets. "The person who does that will not need to look back with sorrow on his past, for God gives him joy" (TLB).

The time to start storing up happy memories is *now*. "*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom*" (**Ps 90:12**). Solomon added another important thought: the ability to *enjoy* life's blessings is also a gift from God. Solomon will expand on this thought in the next chapter and point out the unhappiness of people who possess wealth but are not able to enjoy it. We thank God for food, but we should also thank Him for healthy taste buds and a digestive system that functions correctly. A wealthy friend, now in heaven, often took me and my wife to expensive restaurants, but he was unable to enjoy the food because he couldn't taste it. All of his wealth could not purchase healing for his taste buds

People who are thankful to God "will not dwell over-much upon the passing years," as the *New English Bible* translates verse 20. They will take each day as it comes and use it to serve the Lord It may also mean that the believer who gratefully accepts God's gifts today will not fret and worry about how long he or she will live. It is an established fact that the people who have the most birthdays live the longest, but if they keep complaining about "getting old" they will have very little to enjoy.

CONCLUSION

Solomon will conclude his discussion of "the futility of wealth." He might well have chosen **Matt. 6:33** as the text for his message, "*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*" (NKJV). The important thing is that we love the Lord, accept the lot He assigns us, and enjoy the blessings He graciously bestows.

If we focus more on the gifts than on the Giver, we are guilty of idolatry. If we accept His gifts, but complain about them, we are guilty of ingratitude. If we hoard His gifts and will not share them with others, we are guilty of indulgence. But if we yield to His will and use what He gives us for His glory, then we can enjoy life and be satisfied.