

Session 5

March 31, 2019

## THE PROBLEM WITH WEALTH

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

The wisest man who ever lived was also among the least satisfied. His earnest journey to find meaning in life was coming up empty. In our study thus far, he has given himself over to the pursuit of pleasure, then wisdom, then work, only to find them all lacking in purpose. Instead of fulfilling, he found them to be futility and emptiness; like “chasing the wind.”

We have always been told that money can't buy happiness...but deep down, we'd all like to give it a try! Apparently, Solomon had that same thought. If anything could bring satisfaction, surely money could. But Solomon discovered that collecting wealth came with its own set of problems.

**The more you have...the more you want (vv. 10-12).** It is widely reported that when J. D. Rockefeller was asked how much money is enough, replied, “Just one more dollar.” Whether that report is true or not, Solomon certainly thought the same way! Yet the wise king suggested some other problems associated with greed. First, there is the problem of *sharing* (v. 11). Those who prosper must provide for those under their care, like family members, employees, servants and other dependents. Where do their provisions come from? From the stores of the rich man! So ultimately the poor eat the same delights as the wealthy. And what can the man do but sit by and watch? Second, there is the problem of *stress* (v. 12). Whereas the common worker sleeps well at night regardless of his day, the rich man finds himself tossing and turning with worry over his fortunes.

**The more you gain...the more you have to lose (vv. 13-17).** Three more situations come to mind that clearly bother Solomon regarding wealth, two of which he calls “sickening tragedies” (or more literally *sore evils*). First, he observed how often prosperity turns to misfortune (v. 13). Wealth turned to greed takes risks to make even more. Investments turn sour, and the once wealthy suddenly become the presently poor. What's worse is that the family is left empty handed; embarrassed and destitute when that man dies (v. 14). The second tragedy is found in verse 15: what you bring into this world at your birth is exactly what you will take with you when you leave it at death: nothing! The little phrase “nothing...he can carry in his hands” is noteworthy. Solomon is not lamenting the rewards of a life well lived. There are benefits found in the abundant life God gives. But those who store up treasures on earth will be sorely disappointed when this life ends (see Matt. 6:19-20). The final tragedy Solomon mentions in this section is the misery of the miserly. The greedy can't even enjoy his life! Rather than frolicking in the bright light of his prosperity, his days are spent fretting in mental darkness, over money spent and investments gambled. What he gains in material wealth, he more than loses in emotional, mental, and even physical turmoil (v. 17).

**The joy of wealth is only found in the One who gives it (vv. 18-20).** Finally, Solomon comes to a refreshing conclusion. The abundant life is not found in material wealth, but rather in embracing the blessings of God. Three considerations are offered. First, there is nothing wrong with material blessings; God appointed mankind to work and rewards his labors appropriately (v. 18). Second, God has given *every man* a measure of wealth. Some have more than others materially, but all of us are given all that we need, and all of us can take joy in the rewards of our labors (v. 19). Finally, the one who embraces what God has given is free from the worries of the

wealthy. His days are filled with the peace and contentment God gives to those who find their security in Him (v. 20).