

The Book of Ecclesiastes

Lesson 5: The Love of Money and the Vanity of Riches -- Ecclesiastes 5:8–6:12

Picture a man late at night, long after the house has gone quiet. The bills are paid, the accounts are full, the locks are bolted, and still he lies awake staring at the ceiling. Down the road, in a smaller house, a tired laborer who owns almost nothing has already fallen into a deep and easy sleep. The Preacher saw both men, and he tells us plainly which one is the richer: “Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep” (5:12). Money, it turns out, makes a poor pillow.

Ecclesiastes 5:8 through 6:12 walks us straight into the world we already live in. There is oppression and red tape, official over official, each watching the other (5:8–9). There is the ache that never quite goes away in the heart that loves money: “he who loves money will not be satisfied with money” (5:10). The more you gather, the more hands appear to help you spend it. And there is the saddest picture of all, the man who scrapes and saves a fortune, only to lose it in a bad venture and stand at the end exactly as he started, naked, having labored for the wind (5:13–17).

But the Preacher does not leave us in the dark. Right in the middle of the gloom a window opens and the light pours in. “Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun” (5:18). To eat your bread with gladness, to take honest joy in honest work, to receive your daily portion as a gift and not a possession, this is the gift of God. Chapter 6 then sharpens the warning with a man who has everything money can buy and not one ounce of the power to enjoy it (6:1–2). Wealth without the gift of contentment is a feast no one is allowed to eat.

So where does that leave us, with our paychecks and our shopping carts and our quiet 2 a.m. worries? It leaves us at a fork that every one of us walks every single week. We can chase a number that always moves, or we can receive the day in front of us as a gift and put our treasure where it cannot rust or be stolen. Long before the Lord Jesus said “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21), the Preacher was already pointing us home. Let us listen, and let us look honestly at our own hearts.

Group Discussion: Where in our culture, and even in our own congregation, do we most easily mistake the love of money for simple wisdom or responsibility, and how can we tell the difference between honest provision and a heart that is never satisfied?

Personal Reflection: Think of the last thing you really wanted to buy or earn. If you had gotten it, would your heart have rested, or would it already be reaching for the next thing? What does your honest answer reveal about where your treasure is?

Read Ecclesiastes 5:8–6:12

Study Questions

1. In Ecclesiastes 5:8–10, what does the Preacher observe about oppression, the layers of officials, and the heart that loves money, and what does he mean when he says the lover of money “will not be satisfied with money”?
2. When have you found that getting what you wanted only made you want more, and how did that experience shape the way you think about contentment?
3. According to Ecclesiastes 5:11–12, how does increasing wealth also increase those who consume it, and why does the Preacher say the laborer sleeps sweetly while the rich man lies awake?
4. What robs you of peace and sleep more often, having too little or worrying about keeping what you have, and what does that tell you about where you are leaning for security?
5. In Ecclesiastes 5:13–17, describe the “grievous evil” the Preacher saw, the riches kept to the owner’s hurt and lost in a bad venture, and what it means that a man comes naked and returns naked having “toiled for the wind.”
6. In what ways are you tempted to grip tightly what God has given, as though holding on hard enough could keep it forever, and what would it look like to loosen that grip?
7. How does Ecclesiastes 5:18–20 describe the enjoyment of food, drink, and labor as a gift of God, and how does this guard us from both greed and a false contempt for honest work and God’s good gifts?
8. When was the last time you simply enjoyed your daily bread and your work as a gift from God rather than a source of stress or comparison, and what keeps you from that gladness more often?
9. Drawing together Ecclesiastes 6:1–12 with the Lord’s teaching, how does the man who has wealth but no power to enjoy it (6:1–2) expose the emptiness of trusting in riches, and how do Matthew 6:19–21, 1 Timothy 6:6–10, and Luke 12:13–21 show us where true and lasting treasure is found?
10. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is reshaping your relationship with money and possessions right now, and what concrete step of contentment or generosity is He calling you to take this week?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Matthew 6:19–21, treasure in heaven and where the heart follows; 1 Timothy 6:6–10, godliness with contentment and the love of money as a root of evils; Luke 12:13–21, the rich fool who stored up for himself but was not rich toward God; Proverbs 23:4–5,

riches that sprout wings and fly away; Philippians 4:11–13, learning to be content in any circumstance

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