

“What’s with Wealth?” (Ecclesiastes 5:10–6:9)(3.5.23)

Ecclesiastes 5:10–6:9 (NIV84)

¹⁰ Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.

¹¹ As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?

¹² The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.

¹³ I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner,

¹⁴ or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him.

¹⁵ Naked a man comes from his mother’s womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor

that he can carry in his hand.

¹⁶ This too is a grievous evil:

As a man comes, so he departs,
and what does he gain,
since he toils for the wind?

¹⁷ All his days he eats in darkness,
with great frustration, affliction and anger.

¹⁸ Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. ²⁰ He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

6 I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: ² God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

³ A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. ⁴ It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness

its name is shrouded. ⁵ Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man— ⁶ even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

⁷ All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.

⁸ What advantage has a wise man over a fool?

What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?

⁹ Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite.

This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **"What's with Wealth?"**

INTRODUCTION:

A couple of weeks ago, I received an email from an attorney in Nigeria. He had great news for me. Someone had died and left a fortune and I was a beneficiary. I needed to contact him as soon as possible to coordinate the transfer of funds.

Of course, this is so absurdly unlikely that we wonder why anyone would bother to send such a phishing scheme. So, why do they do it? Because some people cannot resist any chance to get rich. Why are lotteries so popular that our nation gave up trying to outlaw them and now run the biggest lotteries ever? Gambling has been legalized for the same reasons.

And now, we have legalized sports betting because watching the sports wasn't quite exciting enough, I suppose. But wait, there is more. You can now gamble anytime anywhere on your smartphone. Gamble while you work. Gamble while you are in the bathroom. Maybe that is where it really belongs, in the bathroom, because you are just flushing your money away.

Why do people fall for pyramid schemes? Why do they call it playing the stock market? The answer is common to all. It is the desire for wealth. Many folks pursue wealth the old-fashioned way – they earn it. They work, work, work, but at what cost?

BODY:

Qoheleth, our Preacher and teacher, explores the desire for wealth in his search for meaning. Many people believe they will find fulfillment; they will find security; they will make their mark on this world; they will find meaning – or make their own meaning because power follows money. But, it is a chasing after the wind – meaningless: a vapor, a mist, smoke that cannot be grasped. This will be the last time Qoheleth uses this phrase, chasing after the wind, and marks the halfway point of this book.

The structure of this portion of scripture, which is called a chiasm, has an unusual pattern compared to modern Western thought. The conclusion is in the middle. Qoheleth makes an argument building up to the conclusion and then makes an argument after the conclusion to support it. Think of it as a pyramid, with the conclusion at the apex.

It is in the conclusion that we find God. God is mentioned six times in five verses, but not in the verses that form the slope of the pyramid. God is the source of life, our life. And on the timeline of eternity, it is only a few days. God gives wealth and possessions (even to those who claim to be the source of their own wealth).

Enjoyment of our wealth, our work, and our lot in life comes through God alone. When God is the center of our lives, we have a "gladness of heart," which we often call joy. When God gives material things but does not enable a person to enjoy them, Qoheleth calls this a grievous burden, taking the meaning out of life. Our toil, eating and drinking, and all that we possess, whether great or small, comes from the source of every good gift, the Hand of God.

So, if wealth and possessions are a gift from God, did I make a mistake, did I lie to the children, when I told them that the Devil will use money as bait to trap people, to take them captive? Qoheleth says the love of money never satisfies and leads to a meaningless life. It often leads to a life of misery, sleeplessness, and cannot be

held onto. The great equalizer, death, vaporizes material wealth. All this is a grievous evil.

The Apostle Paul agrees when he writes to Timothy he says, 1 Timothy 6:6–10 (NIV84)

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

Qoheleth gave several examples of why wealth, though a gift of God, can lead to misery and emptiness. How can this be? Remember that Satan is a counterfeiter. He is the originator of the bait and switch. When the wealth is an end in itself, the goal, the object of love, an Idol, then you know the person has been entrapped by the Father of Lies, who has been a murderer from the beginning.

Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:24 (NIV84) **"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

Do you know what can protect you from greed? Generosity. In our Bible Study on Ecclesiastes, we are taking a deep look at generosity because it is part of godly living. It builds the kingdom of God. It brings fulfillment and gives meaning to our lives. There is a

series of videos on RightNow Media by Chip Ingram called, "The Genius of Generosity."

The key verse that is used to frame the study is Luke 6:38 (NIV84) "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." These are the words of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 9:6 (NIV84) Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. And a few verse later, ¹¹ You will be made rich in every way **so that you can be generous on every occasion**, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Chip Ingram teaches that faith increases giving and giving increases faith. Those blessed by God become blessers for God. Ingram quotes Randy Alcorn – "God prospers me not to raise my standard of living but to raise my standard of giving."

One of Chip's assignments for the viewers was to watch an interview with Bill and Vonette Bright. Bill was a businessman in Southern California, pursuing the so-called "American Dream" of success and wealth. His plan was derailed when he started going to church and began his journey to become a Christian.

When he received Jesus as Lord and Savior, Bill went all-in. After a few years of walking with the Lord, Bill & Vonette wanted to make their commitment more

concrete. Being a businessman, Bill wrote up a contract between them and God. They signed the contract in 1951 to among other things, to walk by faith. Over and over again, they made their decisions trusting God.

You may know that Bill Bright is the founder of Campus Crusades for Christ. It is a ministry focused on sharing the Gospel on college campuses. In 2020, they had a staff of 19,000 members in 190 countries. This was part of that 1951 contract. Today, the ministry is called Cru.

In 1996, Bill bright received the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion. It came with over a million dollars. People asked him what he was going to do with the money. He replied, "I have already given it away. I gave it away in 1951."

Bill and Vonette did not accept honorariums for their appearances and speeches. Though Bill wrote more than 100 books and booklets, and thousands of articles and pamphlets, they never accepted royalties from them. Why? Because their labor was for God. When Bill reached age 65, he was eligible for a pension, which he then donated away.

Yes, Bill and Vonette are examples of radical generosity. Twice during the interview, Vonette said that they knew that not everyone is called to live like them and do what they did; but, they felt called to live out their faith that way. Bill said, we think of ourselves as a "suit of clothes" for Jesus, so that He can work through us. Bill made a point of saying, your decisions in every aspect of life depend on your View of God.

This week on social media, my professor, Dr. Leonard Sweet, quoted Andrew Wilson's article, "Abundance Is For Everyone:"

"Perhaps we emphasize divine abundance too much. Maybe our obsession with material wealth and welfare results from too much time reflecting on God's fullness. My suspicion, however, is the exact opposite: that we grab what we can because we think our Father's resources will run out. Only by reflecting on his bounty---the vats of wine, the baskets of bread, the grace upon grace---do we cultivate lives that are generous and hearts that are filled with joy unspeakable. As Jesus says in Matthew 10:8, 'Freely you have received; freely give.'"

CONCLUSION:

You have probably heard it said that Jesus spoke more about money than anything else. Luke 12:15–21 (NIV84)

¹⁵ Then he [Jesus] said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

¹⁶ And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷ He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.'

¹⁸ "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." '

²⁰ “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

²¹ “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.”

What will you do to be rich toward God? I had the children give one portion of their gift to the Lord, one portion to their parents to help pay for their daily living, one portion for themselves to use as they wish, and one portion to bless someone else. Examine the way you use your money, your time, and your talents. Will God say? “Well done, my good and faithful servant.”

Imagine yourself crawling through the desert dying of thirst. You come over a dune and there is an oasis. Instead of a pond of water, there is a pump. Beside the pump there is a small jar of water and a piece of an old fragile parchment with directions. The directions tell you to pour the water into the pump to prime it and get the water flowing as you pump. Do you believe the directions? Or, do you drink the water in the jar?

Again, Jesus teaches in Matthew 6:19–21 (NIV84),

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.