

The Meaningless Promises of Materialism

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life

Speaker: Matthew Black

Text: Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Date: Wednesday, June, 30, 2010, 7pm

Theme and Text: Open your Bible to **Ecclesiastes 6**. The title of tonight's message is "The Meaningless Promises of Materialism".

Materialism cuts directly against the Gospel. Money is neutral, but if it is put in the place of God, it is an idol. That's what Jesus had in mind in **Luke 14:33**, "any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple."

I don't think anyone in America would adopt that slogan. Let me ask you, are you willing to be a follower of Christ, even if it costs you everything? We are not to lay up for ourselves "treasures on earth", but lay up "treasures in heaven".

Materialism is extremely attractive. Advertising has made it that way, but money cannot buy anyone happiness. Materialism promises much but delivers little!

Introduction: A hundred years ago, young people started out dirt poor and through hard work and determination, slowly, perhaps by late middle age, they started to accumulate wealth. Most people saved their money, were frugal and careful with money. Ordinary people might have had three or four changes of clothing, and the things they purchased were not disposable. People in 1905 were not materialistic for the most part. People bought what they needed. Most of the colors of things were dark, and most things were simple and practical. They conserved what they could, and there was very little debt in society.

All of that changed with Edward Bernays. What Bernays did was set up propaganda departments in all of American retail companies and businesses. Propaganda was not a very friendly term, so he changed the term to "Public Relations".

Bernays' most famous book is actually entitled "Propaganda". Then Bernays came on the scene and taught people that they should actually be more self focused more concerned about the individual.

He got people smoking cigarettes first. In the 1920s, Bernays' began working for the American Tobacco Company. It was not at all acceptable for women to smoke at the time. He persuaded women's rights marchers in New York City to hold up Lucky Strike cigarettes as symbolic "Torches of Freedom." By relating things to freedom, he pushed women's liberation causes to the front—and women became more independent. No one could argue with women smoking now because he had successfully associated cigarettes and women's rights together with Freedom. There was one main motive in all this. It had nothing to do with freedom. It was MONEY!

Listen to what Bernays writes in his book:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. ... We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society. ... In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons ... who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind.

From the time of Bernays on, Americans were told that they needed this and they needed that—“Simple” and “Practical” became outdated terms! People needed to be “in” and “fashionable”.

Bernays was the author of the idea of what we would call “The American Dream”. He put the dream together. Every one in America if they are anybody should have a car—a house with the three bedrooms and a picket fence. They shouldn’t be simple and practical. That is outdated. The citizen of today is an individual.

So cars and houses and clothes started coming out in every different color and size. Fashions became big.

Now what was the point of all of this materialism? The bottom line was MONEY. Any time more money needs to be made, you don’t need to re-invent the wheel. You just need to change what is fashionable. And more people began to serve “Mammon” the more they moved away from God.

Have you heard someone say to you—those clothes you’re wearing are so 90s! The haircut of that person is so 60s. Why can we day that? Because Propaganda tells us that if we want to be happy we need to be regulated by the fashion police.

What is all of this? Living for what is “in” is idolatry. It’s not wrong to be orderly and clean and modest and sharp. But materialism is Satan’s way of dethroning God.

Randy Alcorn put it this way: “None of us can enthrone the true God unless in the process we dethrone our other gods”. Is money a god in your life? Is money a Savior? We need to be responsible; we need to be careful stewards of our work habits and be dependable people. But Christ is our Master, not money.

C.S. Lewis said this, “He that has God and has everything has no more than he who has God alone”.

I. The Appeal of Materialism is Powerful. (vs. 1-2). Even though we all know money cannot satisfy our deepest desires, there is a massive temptation to think that it will. And Solomon says this appeal is a very great evil.

Ecclesiastes 6:1-2, “There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: 2 a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.”

Satan is the god of this world, and his advertising company is “Lies Incorporated”. He wants you to believe that money will make you happy.

You have to admit materialism’s appeal is quite powerful. Everywhere you go, you are encouraged that if you can just buy health and happiness. But God has a different opinion. Those who trust in money are weighted down with a great evil. They can never enjoy their wealth or find ultimate satisfaction. God didn’t make wealth to be worshipped. He is the One we are to worship.

So Solomon says in **verse 1**, “There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind”.

A. The evil of the idol of money (vs. 1)

There is an evil that weighs all of us down—it is the idolatry of money. It is to live as if all there is in this world is what we see with our eyes. If your main goal in life is to make a lot of money, you are going to be part of a vast crowd of empty, frustrated, materialistic people. Yet this evil weighs down heavily on all people. There is a temptation to only live for the here and now.

Money without God equals misery. Now don’t get me wrong. Money is not evil. Money is morally neutral. It is a means of payment. What you buy is not neutral. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:19-21**, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Where a person’s money goes tells a lot about a person. The majority of people in this world live as if this life is all there is. Those who try to find meaning and purpose in this world apart from God are going to be severely disappointed, frustrated, and miserable.

Explanation: When a person puts money in the place of God, the Lord may give that man much money, but He will take away his power to enjoy it. When we find our security in money, we become materialists. Jesus said that we “cannot serve God and Mammon”.

Satan is the god of materialism. He runs the corrupt thinking of this present world that is at war with God. The lie that Satan has been promoting since his fall, is that you can be happy without God. If only you won the lotto. So many people go to Vegas for a chance at instant money.

Money cannot produce joy in your life. God is seen in this verse as the only one that can give us the power to enjoy wealth. So many people stake their happiness on money, and it is literally destroying their lives. We are told that half of all marriages end in divorce, and 80% of divorced people indicate that financial struggles played a major role in ending their marriage.¹

B. The irony of the idol of money. (vs. 2)

Ecclesiastes 6:2, “a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.”

The Irony of money is that Money is a Passing Commodity

Money comes from God. Therefore, God can give all of our riches to a “stranger”. The word “stranger” means, “someone completely unrelated to you”. Think about the treasures of King Tut. His treasures didn’t do him very much good. We enjoy them today much more than he did. In other words, money is a passing commodity.

Eventually, we will all die, and all that we have will be possessed and **enjoyed by** some **stranger** – someone we don’t know.

II. The Attraction of Materialism is Fading. (vs. 3-9) The attraction of materialism fades. People sacrifice everything for riches, and it doesn’t satisfy, so they start adding other things.

A. Money Plus Children Does Not Equal Happiness. (vs. 3-5)

Maybe if I have a lot of children to share my riches with, then I’ll be happy! Solomon says that won’t work! Look at **Ecclesiastes 6:3-4**, “If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life’s good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. 4 For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered”.

Children are certainly a bring joy, but they also bring many added responsibilities and even many heartaches. They can be thankless in light of their parents’ generosity. You see money can’t take away depression. Children can’t lift our frustrations. Many turn their dreams to a family. Some mothers who are childless think that if they only had children they would be happy.

If our ultimate happiness comes from anywhere outside of Christ, it is built on sinking sand. It is a cracked and crumbling foundation. Solomon says something astounding.

¹ Larry Burkett. “Good Financial Stewardship,” *Religions and Liberty* (July – August): 1.

For the one without a godly understanding of riches, it would be better if he had never been born. A miscarried or stillborn child is better off because there is so much pain and responsibility. At least the stillborn child doesn't have the pain of living, but instead can rest. **Ecclesiastes 6:5**, "Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he."

B. Money Plus Long Life Will Not Satisfy Us! (vs. 6-7)

I know what about long life? That will work! I will have lots of money, lots of children, and long life. Listen, because we live on a sin cursed earth, long life will just multiply your sorrows. **Ecclesiastes 6:6**, "Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?" Living long will not help because we are all headed to the grave. We all have to face death. Solomon of course is not addressing our eternal destiny. He already did that in **Ecclesiastes 3:17**, "I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work."

People are doing everything today to stay alive and live longer healthier lives. Now it is important to be stewards of our bodies, but America's obsession with fitness does not have God in the equation. People want to save the earth, legislate what you eat, and they are even trying to find ways to genetically alter our DNA to take away predispositions to inherited diseases.

While all of that is noble, but the motive is really to conquer or put off death as long as possible. The truth of the matter is that death is coming, and when that happens, all the money, and all the good life, and all the children will not help you.

Don't get me wrong, long life is a blessing from God if you know the Lord. But if you don't know the Lord, your life is just more vanity added onto vanity. In eternity, it will hurt, not help if you lived longer.

The point that Solomon is making is that we are all going to die. The pleasures and pains of this life will soon be forgotten. For those who trust in their money, it would be better that they would have miscarried in their mother's womb. Those who trust in riches have their reward on this earth, and much of it is money that they cannot enjoy with children they do not enjoy and a life they do not enjoy. How sad it is to live without Christ!

Why do We Work So Hard for All this Money?

We work so that we can eat and enjoy life. Well, Solomon reiterates the same problem in **Ecclesiastes 6:7** – All that you are working for will never satisfy you—"All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied."

C. What if I Add Wisdom with All My Prosperity? (vs. 8-9)

Still there is no advantage. **Ecclesiastes 6:8**, "For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living?" 9 Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind."

The uneducated poor man is in a better position if he is content. The wise rich man has no advantage over the poor and uneducated. The fool is wiser than the scholar if he is content with what he sees. The rich may have much, but they also have a “wandering of the appetite” that can never be satisfied. They are striving “after the wind”—after something they will never catch!

III. The Argument for Materialism is Futile. (vs. 10-12) Man cannot escape this “rat race”. Without God, all men are pursuing their own way, and it always ends up in frustration. Life is unsatisfying apart from God, and all the money and material resources in the world cannot take away that fact. Our temptation is to argue with God about it.

Often when we don’t get what we want in life (which is EVERYBODY) we want to dispute with God and say that life is not fair. But we are not going to get very far disputing with God.

Look at **Ecclesiastes 6:10**, “Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with One stronger than he.” This is a bit of an obscure verse, but most believe the one stronger than man is referring to God. If that is the case, then this verse is talking about the providence of God bringing to pass “whatever has come to be”. It’s “already been named by God”. God knows who man is. Man is the creature, and He can never dispute with the One who is stronger than Him, namely God. We can dispute all day long that life is not fair. But truly all that we struggle with, we’ve brought on our selves. The only solution is to turn to the Lord and to surrender to Him and STOP disputing!

A. Stop Fighting against God—it’s of no use. (vs. 11)

That’s what Solomon says in **Ecclesiastes 6:11**, “The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man?” No matter how many books we write trying to improve our lives through money, through children, through the obsession with long life, it’s all a vain dispute. We need to submit to our Creator. We need to live in loving union with Him and His ways and His plans for us. Arguing with God is an exercise in futility. It’s useless!

B. Instead Start listening to God. (vs. 12)

You’ll never find satisfaction apart from Him! You certainly cannot find it on your own.

Ecclesiastes 6:12, “For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?”

A mere human being cannot know what is good for him. He looks at all the temporary things and tries to satisfy himself with all this world has to offer. But this world is quickly passing away. And all the money, family, and long life he can get will not make his life satisfying. He’s still going to be “grasping after the wind”!

Conclusion: What is the Conclusion? Solomon has wisely taught us that we should aspire to a happy and holy in God whether we are rich or poor.

I'll make the application. Solomon concludes this chapter by asking in **verse 12b**, "For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?" The answer is God! The Bible can tell what will happen after man's life "under the sun".

Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

The truly wealthy person is the one who has put his trust in God!