

Wealth without Christ is Meaningless

Series: Finding the Meaning of Life

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Text: Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

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Introduction: Open your Bible to **Ecclesiastes 5**. We'll begin in verse 8. The title of tonight's message is "Wealth without Christ is Meaningless".

Let me ask you—do you suffer from “back” problems? “Back” taxes, “back” rent, and “back” utility bills? Our faith is often tested by money problems. Whether you are wealthy or poor here tonight, we all have money problems. We all understand that we are stewards of all God has given us. Whether you are well off or barely making it, God has purposed special tests for you that involve money. He wants you to be faithful.

Solomon shares some ancient wisdom with us about money. We ought never to put our trust in it. Money never solved any one's true problems. What is the answer to all our problems and worries? We must trust in God.

Let's look at several tests of our faith here tonight.

- I. **Be careful not to put your ultimate trust in government.** Government can be good but it's not the ultimate answer. “The powers that be are ordained by God” (**Romans 13:1, KJV**). But our hope must be in God.

How many times have you gone to the polls to elect a new government official with high hopes of change for our country? We ought to be involved as good stewards in government and elections, but truly, we ought not to put our ultimate hope in government. In fact, Solomon says that

- A. **We shouldn't be surprised that bad government exists everywhere.**

Check out **Ecclesiastes 5:8a**, “If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter”.

We ought not to be surprised that corruption exists in the government. Power and money are a gift of God, but there are always people who will take advantage of their power for their own gain. People who are given power are prone to abuse it.

First, what do you do when you see government abuse of power?

- B. **Trust in God's power over government.** **Ecclesiastes 5:8b**, “for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them”. God has ordained the “powers that be”.

Romans 13:1, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.”

Yet even in the best of governments, there is corruption. And above the highest officials in our world, there is the **Highest One**—we will all stand before the Lord and give an account.

We ought to pray for all our government officials, but our ultimate trust must not be in them, but in God.

C. **Pray for good government.** It seems the ideas of capitalism in the 21st century were found all the way back in Solomon’s day. **Verse 9**, “But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.” Take good care of land owners, and the poor will have work! We ought to pray for this. It is a great gain for a country to have leaders that have prospering businesses.

So what are you going to do when you are tested by bad government?

- Don’t be surprised.
- Trust in God, and
- Pray for good government.

Good government is healthy, but our ultimate accountability is the highest power, that is God Himself.

II. **Be Careful not to trust in Money.**

Are you leaning too much on money? Have you ever seen someone leaning on a car and that car just pulls away? That’s about what money will do for us if we trust in it! Let me ask you five questions that will help determine if you are leaning too much on money...

1. Do you think money can buy happiness?
2. Do you think money will take all your worries away?
3. Do you trust in riches to get you through problems?
4. Do you ever live as if you could bring your riches with you after you die?
5. Do you think money will allow you to suffer less, be less depressed, or less angry?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then it’s time to readjust your focus. You can have all the money in the world, but if you don’t have Christ, you will lose everything.

Jesus said in **Matthew 16:26**, “what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?”

So let me ask you, do you think money can buy happiness? The truth is...

A. **Money will not ultimately bring satisfaction or happiness.** Money is a tool with which to serve God, so Solomon says in **Ecclesiastes 5:10**, “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”

Solomon says it is wrong to love money. There is nothing wrong with those who have great possessions. But the “love of money” is the root of all kinds of evil. Solomon is attacking greed and materialism. To the money-hungry, enough is never enough.

Money can buy a certain level of physical comfort, but it cannot buy contentment for your soul.

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 care, and be on your guard against all covetousness,” warned Jesus, “for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15).¹

If you are living for that pay raise or that perfect job, your focus is off! Seeking happiness from money is a negative investment. You will get no return.

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

Do you think money will take all your worries away? The truth is...

B. Money will increase your responsibility and worry!

Ecclesiastes 5:11-12, “When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? 12 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.”

The Bible is clear that material wealth doesn’t equate to happiness. Don’t take my word for it. Listen to the richest people that have ever lived.

- “The care of 200 million dollars is enough to kill anyone. There is no pleasure in it.” *W H Vanderbilt said that. Vanderbilt was the one that built the railroads.*
- John Jacob Astor of the Waldorf Astoria hotel fame said this: “I am the most miserable man on earth.”
- John D. Rockefeller who made all of his money there in the oil business, at least later in his life said, “I have made millions, but they have brought me no happiness.”
- “Millionaires seldom smile,” Andrew Carnegie said.
- Henry Ford said this: “I was happier when I was doing a mechanics job.”

¹Wiersbe, W. W. (1996, c1990). *Be satisfied* (Ec 5:10). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books.

Illustration: We all understand this don't we? I used to work at National Bullet Proof in Hickory Hills. I punched in at 7am, worked a punch press, or welder all day, and then punched out. I didn't have to worry about any big time decisions.

On the other hand, as my boss's business grew, he had more employees to feed! **Verse 11**, "When goods increase, they increase who eat them". So who has the advantage as far as a peaceful life? I could go home, relax, take my wife out for a happy meal at McDs. My boss could have taken his wife to the classiest restaurant, but never had time to.

So, you see, **verse 12**, "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."

Illustration: Have you ever talked to a small business owner? They work 24-7 because all the responsibility is on them. *Be thankful when you work hard, but you get to come home and play with your kids, and leave your worries at work. Then you can sleep!*

Illustration: John D. Rockefeller is 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!²

Yet, without Christ, riches are vain. Jesus said in **Matthew 16:26**, "what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? Or what shall a man give in return for his life?"

Do you trust in riches to get you through problems? The truth is...

C. Wealth very often fails people when they need it the most. We have to be careful as believers that our motive for working is not simply to acquire wealth. If we think money can deliver us from all our troubles, then we have allowed money to take the place of God, and as you know money is a lousy Savior! It fails over and over again!

Solomon tells us a story about this in **Ecclesiastes 5:13-14**, "There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept [HOARDED] by their owner to his hurt, 14 and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand." Here is a guy who works like a madman gaining all this money to his own hurt, probably to his family's hurt – just denying himself vacations, working like an insane man, and then in one day through a bad venture he loses everything, and his children get no inheritance!

When we hoard our money, we lose perspective and really hurt ourselves. **We cannot trust in money!** You see, **money and investments are totally uncertain.** You could hoard your money, and in one day lose it all in a bad venture.

²Ibid.

Remember what the Apostle Paul told to Timothy in **1 Timothy 6:17**, “As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.”

Do you believe that God will give you everything you need to enjoy? Trust in God, not in uncertain riches.



It is likely that Solomon is the author of **Proverbs 23:4-5**. He gives us a very realistic picture of money! Did you know your money has wings?!! “Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. 5 When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.”

Application: Think about how quickly money vanishes. Jill and I bought our house at the height of the housing market. In the last four years, we’ve lost \$30,000 off our housing value. You know what? I’m not terribly worried, because I am not hoping in riches!

Do you ever live as if you could bring your riches with you after you die? The truth is...

D. No one has ever brought their money with them beyond the grave.

I’ve never been to a funeral where the person being buried took anything with him. God is not going to ask us how much money we earned, but what we did with the money He gave us.

Solomon says in **verses 15-16**, “As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. 16 This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?”

You can’t bring money with you, but you can use it for the glory of God while you are here! If you don’t utilize your resource for the kingdom of God and the glory of God, then Solomon tells us we are just “toil[ing] for the wind”! How sad!

Do you think money will allow you to suffer less, be less depressed, or less angry? The truth is...

E. Rich people are not exempt from suffering, sickness, depression and anger! Verse 17, “Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.”

Many rich people have so much money, but they are miserable. They suffer with the same bitter circumstances of life, the same illnesses and unpredictable diseases, and certainly there are thousands of ways life brings suffering to us. Without Christ, our riches cannot help us. But Christ can help us through all the uncertain difficulties of life!

III. **The Secret to Contentment is Trusting in God.** Has God ever failed anybody? Who puts government and wealth and all things in place? Who made you and all things and keeps the world running? God. So we can trust in Him.

Listen to what Solomon says in **Ecclesiastes 5:18**, “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 the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.” The New Testament puts it this way:

- **1 Corinthians 10:31**, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”
- **Matthew 6:33**, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

In other words...

A. **Trust God enough to enjoy your work.** **Ecclesiastes 5:18b**, “find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.” I believe every Christian should take pride in His work. For one thing we do not ultimately work for our employer, but for God. For another thing, accomplishing what God made you for is exhilarating. What ever you do, do it with all your might for the glory of God! Enjoy your work.

B. **Trust God enough to enjoy the fruit of your labor.** It is a gift of God. While you don't want to be wasteful with money, you don't want to just sit on it either. Enjoy it. Solomon says that “it is good and fitting....” that, **verse 19**, “Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.” One way you can enjoy what you have is to always be thankful for what you have.

C. **Trust God by storing up God-glorifying happy memories!** **Verse 20**, “For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.”

The Christian life is not always an easy life, but it is a joy-filled life, Amen? Isn't it wonderful to be a Christian and to know that we can trust God with our work and enjoy Him?

Through your work and enjoyment of life with your family and fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, God will give you keep you so busy with joy and happy memories.

When things are hard and difficult, life goes by slow, right? When things are good, life goes by fast. God commands us here to make an effort to enjoy our work and our time with our family and friends for the glory of God.

Conclusion: Let's be careful to enjoy Him in our work. Whether you pick up garbage for a living or manage money or wait tables or are a secretary, whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Work for the glory of God. Live for the glory of God.

Let me close by giving you a quote by Warren Wiersbe, former pastor of the Moody Church,

“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.”³**

³Ibid.