

“The Distraction of Wealth”
Ecclesiastes 5:8-20
(Preached at Trinity, July 30, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citation will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Chapter 5** opens with Solomon charging religious people to give careful attention to how they approach God in worship.
Ecclesiastes 5:1 NAU - "Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil."
2. Guard your steps. This implies approaching worship with care and caution, coming before God in humility and submission. It implies coming with ears to hear and heed God's Word. Solomon divides it into several areas for consideration:
 - I. Take heed in how you hear the Word of God and make sacrifices – Verse 1
 - II. Take heed in how you pray – Verses 2-3
 - III. Take heed in making vows – Verses 4-6
3. Now as we come to **Verse 8** Solomon seems to completely change course. He speaks of the oppression of the poor and denial of justice, of wicked magistrates and officials watching over one another, apparently enabling one another in their schemes of injustice. It reminds us of the wickedness condemned by the prophet Micah.
Micah 2:1-2 NAU - "Woe to those who scheme iniquity, Who work out evil on their beds! When morning comes, they do it, For it is in the power of their hands.
² They covet fields and then seize *them*, And houses, and take *them* away. They rob a man and his house, A man and his inheritance."
4. And then beginning with **Verse 10** Solomon shifts to the love of money. Is this passage completely removed from the previous passage on approaching God in worship, or is it connected. I want us to see it is intimately connected.
5. Almost everyone (except Solomon) agrees that **Verses 8-9** are difficult to interpret. It makes it easier if we maintain the context. This true of the whole Bible. As it is often repeated, the three most important rules for interpreting Scripture are Context, Context, and Context.
6. **Verses 1-7** speak of giving careful attention to how we approach God in worship. Then Solomon shifts to the love of money; of riches and investments. But it is not unrelated. Rather it is an important consideration. Earthly things are the very things that rob us of worship. Our hearts are so entangled with riches we are completely unable to approach God. Jesus spoke of it in His Parable of the Sower. Like thorns in the garden riches choke out the Gospel.
Matthew 13:22 NAU - "And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful."

7. **Verse 8** speaks of oppressing the poor. The oppression involved the highest officials. What was their motivation? It was their greed. Solomon says do not be surprised when political power leads to oppression. And don't be surprised when those in political power protect one another so that justice becomes almost impossible. It is a common axiom – Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
8. In spite of the oppressive actions of kings, they are a necessary evil. God has ordained power for our good. That's the point of **Verse 9**. They are appointed to regulate the injustice of man against man. They protect boundaries and natural resources. They protect one farmer from infringing upon the practices of another. But their power can pervert their hearts. We must pray for them.
1 Timothy 2:1-3 NAU - "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior."
9. We are easily overcome by greed. The love of money robs men of their love of God. This is the warning in this passage.
- I. The first thing we need to see is the great danger of wealth
- A. The love of money can cause us lust after more and more
Ecclesiastes 5:10 NAU - "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance *with its* income. This too is vanity."
Ecclesiastes 5:13 NAU - "There is a grievous evil *which* I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt."
1. When wealth is your god you will seek it with your whole heart.
 2. Those who seek wealth will not seek God.
 - a. This was the problem with the rich young ruler
Mark 10:21-22 NAU - "Looking at him, Jesus felt a love for him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." ²² But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property."
 - b. A divided heart will never trust his life to God
Luke 16:13 NAU - "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."
 3. Those who make their way to worship with divided hearts will not enter into God's presence.
 4. Solomon warns, "Guard your steps as you go to the house of God"
- B. Wealth causes stress and distraction that robs us of our peace
Ecclesiastes 5:12 NAU - "the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep."
1. Perhaps Solomon has in mind the indigestion he had often experienced – going to bed on a stomach full of all the riches of wealthy man's diet.

2. More likely, he had in mind the constant worry wealth can bring.
 - a. How do we earn more?
 - b. How do we protect our wealth from unscrupulous men.
 - c. How do we protect our wealth from downturns in the economy?
How do we guard our investments?
Ecclesiastes 5:14 NAU - "When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him."
3. Such worries occupy our thoughts, rob us of sleep, and can have a negative impact upon our health.
4. Worst of all, it will rob us of our worship.
 - a. Our thoughts will continually be drawn to worldly affairs.
 - b. We will think about the coming week. Our thoughts will be drawn to our next purchase, our next vacation.
 - c. Because of our long days in the pursuit of riches and our negatively impacted sleep, we are so tired on the Lord's Day we are easily overcome by drowsiness and slumber.
5. Solomon describes it in the strongest of negative terms.
Ecclesiastes 5:13 NAU - "There is a grievous evil *which* I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt."
רָעָה – calamity, disaster, often translated as evil
The worst of the calamity is the loss of God.
1 Timothy 6:9-10 NAU - "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."
6. Douglas O'Donnell: "When the rich get money, they do not get satisfaction from it—not the satisfaction they thought it would bring. There is a God-made and God-shaped void that even a billion dollars can't fill."¹
7. Consider these things carefully.
"Guard your steps as you go to the house of God"

- II. On the other hand, there are many benefits of not being attracted to wealth
Ecclesiastes 5:12 NAU - "The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much"
- A. There is satisfaction at the end of a hard day's work.
 1. At the end of a day of labor sleep is a pleasant reward.
 2. He partakes of his food with thanksgiving and peace.
 3. He doesn't have to worry about losing his wealth, or profits and losses, inflation and increasing costs, supply chain issues.
 - B. His worship is not distracted with worldliness.
 1. His heart and mind are focused.
He is not easily distracted.

¹ Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Ecclesiastes*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Iain M. Duguid, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2014), 125.

2. He may be concerned about low wages and poor working conditions, but he finds comfort and peace as he cries out to God in faith and assurance.
3. What a blessing to have God as the focus of our lives.
Psalm 144:15 NAU - "How blessed are the people whose God is the LORD!"
Psalm 1:1-3 NAU - "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. ³ He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers."

III. The greatest of tragedies is to live our brief life seeking earthly wealth, only to leave empty handed.

Ecclesiastes 5:15-16 NAU - "As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. He will take nothing from the fruit of his labor that he can carry in his hand. ¹⁶ This also is a grievous evil-- exactly as a man is born, thus will he die. So what is the advantage to him who toils for the wind?"

- A. We arrive and leave this world exactly the same way
 1. Babies are born naked and void of earthly riches.
We all leave this world without all the goods we've amassed.
 2. If the wealthiest man cannot take his wealth with him, what's the point of expending our life's energy seeking to gain more.
As Martin Luther said, "As I shall forsake my riches when I die, so I forsake them while I am living."²
- B. Jesus helps us put it all in perspective.
Matthew 16:26 NAU - "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"
 1. Ponder gaining the whole world – owning everything. All of the earth's gold piled up for you to place in storehouses. All of the jewels, all of the money, all placed into your account. Jesus said you are a fool to trade your soul for this.
 2. Sadly, millions are settling for far less. They labor to acquire this world's goods and pleasures and then they die only to leave them to others. All of this world's wealth simply passes from one fool to another.
 3. People who are willing to sell their soul for the wealth they cannot keep.
Jim Elliot - "He is no fool who gives what he **cannot keep** to gain that which he cannot lose."
 4. They rob themselves of the spiritual life that Christians can enjoy trading it for the riches in this life that make promises of joy but turn out to be deceitful lies. The man whose god is his wealth finds emptiness. In his miserly heart he hoards and becomes angry as his life draws to a close and he finds nothing of true value.
Ecclesiastes 5:17 NAU - "Throughout his life *he* also eats in darkness with great vexation, sickness and anger."

² Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2010), 135.

Conclusion:

1. The important thing is to not wait until the end to consider this.
The deathbed is not the place to consider the futility of riches
Solomon says consider these things carefully.
"Guard your steps as you go to the house of God"
2. It is also of infinite importance to ask yourself the question as you go to the house of God. Is Jesus your true treasure?
Matthew 6:19-21 NAU - "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 neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; ²¹ for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."