

**ECCLESIASTES**  
**Ecclesiastes 5:8-20**  
**“True Riches”**  
**April 7, 2024**

**Ecclesiastes 5:8-20**

**<sup>8</sup> 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, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. <sup>9</sup> But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.**

**<sup>10</sup> He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. <sup>11</sup> When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? <sup>12</sup> 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.**

**<sup>13</sup> There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, <sup>14</sup> and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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? <sup>17</sup> Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.**

**<sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart. <sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ec 5:8–20.

This is God's Word.

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Have you heard of Etty Hillesum? Her memoir was published in 1996.

Here is just a portion ...

***You have made me so rich, oh God, please let me share out Your beauty with open hands. My life has become an uninterrupted dialogue with You, oh God, one great dialogue.***<sup>2</sup>

Though there is no evidence that she was a Christian, she was nonetheless seeking relationship, as evidenced by her expressing the uninterrupted dialogue with God. ***“You have made me so rich...”***

We continue with the Preacher, the king Solomon, under the Holy Spirit's inspiration verse-by-verse through this Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. A book of profound statements, raw honesty, and a perpetual realization that life, true life, may not be what is visible on the surface. Or, as Solomon stated numerous times, all that he has seen “under the sun” leads to questions of worth, value, and purpose. If we keep our view under the sun, the result is, by his own words “vanity of vanities.”<sup>3</sup>

To see above the sun, we have to peer deeper. It is a paradox. Yet, the wisdom of God, through Solomon, gives us insight and ultimately answers.

The Bible says much about desiring riches. Regardless of what the prosperity con-artists attest as they fleece the “tithes” from coerced members of their tax-exempt non-profits, a bigger bank account is not the promised return on investment for commoditized faith.

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<sup>2</sup> Hillesum, Etty. *An Interrupted Life: The Diaries, 1941-1943 and Letters from Westerbork*. Translated by A.J. Pomerans (New York: Holt, 1996), 332.

<sup>3</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ec 1:2.

On the other hand, an empty bank account does not elevate one's status as more spiritual either.

There is so much here and as Solomon (who wasn't struggling to pay bills, by the way) states, the true issues are not easily viewable.

Three things to consider today. I'll give you two now, and the third at the close of this sermon.

1. **Serious Injustice**
2. **Sad Investments**
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (To be shared later)

### **SERIOUS INJUSTICE**

In the opening verses, the Preacher pulls no punches at declaring the more bureaucratic an organization is, especially government, the more injustice and oppression occurs.

Is there anyone here who actually believes that every single person working in a corporate or governmental agency is pure-hearted and working for the better of others? Oh, there are some. Some of you are those who desire to make the world better and would never willingly oppress others. I would hope the same for me.

People have been climbing ladders of success since we first built ladders. In some cases, the next rung on the ladder to success crushes the person below. This is what Solomon is seeing. This is what he is lamenting.

People will step over, or upon, other people to get ahead. Friendships fade when opportunities arise. As Norm said on the 1980s sitcom *Cheers*, "It's a dog-eat-dog world and I'm wearing Milk-Bone underwear."

Point taken.

The Preacher sees the corruption and he is frustrated. He sees that corruption can spread like a cancer through the entire structure of authority and devastate the poor.<sup>4</sup>

Government is actually a good institution, designed and permitted by God to facilitate justice as a benefit for all citizens. Yet, when corruption grows within, oppression and exploitation of the least resourced often occurs.<sup>5</sup>

We should not be surprised when people, though image-bearers of God, reveal the depravity of their hearts by using power to abuse others. Eventually injustice reaches all the way down to the poor, who would probably oppress someone if they could, but they cannot simply because they are at the bottom rung of the ladder and there is no one beneath them.<sup>6</sup>

## **SAD INVESTMENTS**

The second reality that causes concern for the Preacher Solomon is how the money and possessions people long to have and often work their entire lives to obtain become things they were never intended to be.

Maybe one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible regarding riches is found in Paul's first letter to Timothy.

### **1 Timothy 6:10**

**<sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.** <sup>7</sup>

You have likely heard people say “money is the root of all evil” and it is clear when you actually read the verse that is not what it says. But,

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<sup>4</sup> Bartholomew, Craig G. *Ecclesiastes: Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 221.

<sup>5</sup> Bartholomew, 221.

<sup>6</sup> Ryken, Philip Graham. *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 130.

<sup>7</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Ti 6:10.

people have been writing their own versions of Bible verses for centuries just to affirm a point they wish to make.

There is the young man who desired to follow Jesus and was told by Christ plainly what he had to do.

### **Matthew 19:21**

**<sup>21</sup> Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”<sup>8</sup>**

He didn't. So he left Jesus. An incredible verse certainly, but perhaps misread, misquoted, or intentionally ignored by many who need to get the point. It is hard to be wealthy and follow Christ, it seems. Something about an eye of the needle comes to mind. Yet, we would be wise to listen to the wise so that we may better understand the truth that is not sequestered “under the sun.”

Randy Alcorn, in his book *The Treasure Principle*, gives the “more you have” warnings to those Christians who just believe that if they had more money and stuff...everything would be better. This is based on Ecclesiastes 5:

- Verse 10 – The more you have, the more you want.
- Verse 10 – The more you have, the less you're satisfied.
- Verse 11 – The more you have, the more people will come after it.
- Verse 11 – The more you have, the more you realize it does you no good.
- Verse 12 – The more you have, the more you have to worry about.
- Verse 13 – The more you have, the more you can hurt yourself by holding onto it.
- Verse 14 – The more you have, the more you have to have.
- Verse 15 – The more you have, the more you'll leave behind.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 19:21.

<sup>9</sup> Alcorn, Randy. *The Treasure Principle: Unlocking the Secret to Joyful Living* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 55-6.

It does not take the wisest person on the planet to understand this. From here, it is so obvious, right?

This message from Solomon, a man with much money and more possessions than can be counted, is insightful, but there is something deeper and this is our third and final point.

### **SINFUL IDOLATRY**

It really isn't about the power. It really isn't about the money. It *is* about the idol.

The greatest threat to a person's devotion to God is idolatry.<sup>10</sup> Despite knowing this, many just ignore this commandment to not put anything or anyone before God.

There is joy in contentedness, but for many the concept of joy is so undefined that they settle for giddiness. Contentedness often seems out of reach for many. Solomon's warnings ring loudly, but the bell is clanging not because people are too busy collecting money and items that will eventually be gone, dispersed, lost, or sold at an estate sale. We all think that if we ever struck it rich, we'd be different than all the other people who have. We convince ourselves we would invest wisely, give to the poor, pay off church debts, fund missionaries, and more.

And...maybe we would, but rest assured, the pressures and temptations revealed by Solomon will not skip over any of us if we were given the opportunity to have more. The lie that more fixes everything has its genesis in Genesis. "Eve...did God really say? You know he's holding out on you, right?" And the liars lie just finds a new fruit to attach itself to.

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<sup>10</sup> Ryman, Matt. "The Heart Is an Idol Factory." *Tabletalk*, 26 July 2023, [tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2023/08/the-heart-is-an-idol-factory](http://tabletalkmagazine.com/article/2023/08/the-heart-is-an-idol-factory).

So, where is this hope? This contentedness? This fix? It is in the Christ. The Messiah. The sinless Son of God. God the Son in human flesh. Lord of lords. King of kings. Friend of sinners. Savior and Redeemer. The remover of idols

You remember what I read earlier from Etty Hillesum? Here's a bit more...

“Sometimes when I stand in some corner of the camp, my feet planted on your earth, my eyes raised toward your heaven, tears sometimes run down my face, tears of deep emotion and gratitude. At night, too when I lie in my bed and rest in you, oh God, tears of gratitude run down my face, and that is my prayer. The beat of my heart has grown deeper, more active, and yet more peaceful, and it is as if I were all the time storing up inner riches.”

Etty died in Auschwitz on November 30, 1943.

What can we learn from a Jewish woman who was murdered by the Nazi regime of Germany during WWII? Perspective perhaps.

As Christians, as the redeemed, as the holders of the greatest gift of eternity, salvation in Christ, we **ARE** rich. These are not just “inner riches” but eternal riches that will not rust, decay, devalue, or be destroyed. To seek identity in any temporal riches or possessions is to abandon God and betray him through the worship of an idol, something we have declared will give us worth, power, purpose, or value.

How foolish. As Martin Luther said, “What sort of god is it that is not even capable of defending himself against moths and rust?”<sup>11</sup>

May we live content as worshipers of the one, true, eternal God.

Our response? Repent. Receive God's forgiveness. Live renewed.

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<sup>11</sup> Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1972), 21:173.