

**Ecclesiastes 5:10-20 – Excel in the Grace of Giving**

**Do you realize that Jesus spoke more about money than any other topic? More often than prayer, more often than witnessing, more often than faith, Jesus spoke clearly and specifically about money. As a matter of fact, the entire Bible is filled with stories and teachings on the topic of money.**

**The reason the Bible deals so often about money has to do with the fact that money is one of the most powerful weapons Satan, our enemy, uses to separate us from our heavenly Father. The devil, throughout history and to this day, uses money to destroy homes, businesses, countries, and the personal lives of many people.**

**We also need to evaluate our attitudes about money, because money is an excellent place to start in taking a look at ourselves as God's stewards who are called to "excel in the grace of giving." How we handle our money is one of the best indicators of where our hearts are at because we are to manage our money according to God's will.**

**Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Talk is cheap. Anyone can talk about what it takes to live the Christian life. Anyone can talk about how great God is, but the true test of stewardship is whether or not we're bearing fruit. Jesus said that His followers will be recognized by their fruit. One of the clearest insights we can gain into ourselves is what we do with the money God gives to us.**

**King Solomon, who wrote our text from Ecclesiastes, was a very, very wealthy man. Perhaps the richest, certainly the wisest, king in the history of Israel. Solomon lived about 2800 years ago, and what he taught in this book still has relevance today. In verse 10, Solomon addressed the sin of greed. Greed: the desire for more and more of something, especially money, the opposite of the desire to give, much less to excel in giving. Solomon wrote, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless." Jesus also warned us of the all-consuming nature of greed. He said, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." Isn't it interesting that two notable figures in history, one among the wealthiest, the other among the poorest, warned us about the negative effect greed can have in our lives!**

**The truth is that it doesn't matter who you are or what your financial situation is; we are all susceptible to greed. The best way to face that destructive force is to "excel in the grace of giving!" Jesus followed His warning with a parable on the futility of amassing wealth in the Parable of the Rich Fool, saying that those who do will end up with nothing. "That is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God," Jesus concluded.**

**Now, getting back to the subject of greed, let's examine some of its symptoms. How can you know if you've been bitten by the bug of greed? Solomon began by saying, "Whoever loves money never has money enough." Here is the first symptom then: a love of money. The Apostle Paul seemed to agree for he wrote, "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." What exactly does the Bible mean by these words? Does it mean that it is wrong to enjoy or desire money? Should we be repulsed by or hate money? Then we're all in trouble, because we all like money! Right? Does it mean that if rich Aunt Martha leaves all her money to us, we should refuse to accept it, saying, "Oh, no! Not money! I hate money!"**

**What's so bad about loving money? When the Bible talks about loving money, it's not talking about enjoying the use of money; it's talking about liking it so much that we develop a "love relationship" with it. Then we're in trouble. Paul explained that pitfall. In writing to the early Christians about holy living, he equated greed with the sin of idolatry. In Colossians**

3:5, he wrote, **"Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."** In Ephesians 5:5, he uses very strong words to condemn greed: **"No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."**

We know that, in years gone by and still in some places today, people actually worship idols made of wood or gold or metal. The Bible very explicitly condemns that practice. **"You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol ..."** We are to worship only the one true living God Who has revealed Himself in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Though most of us do not bow down before idols, that doesn't mean that we, in our own ways, don't sometimes make idols of our money or our possessions or whatever our money can buy. Greed can produce those idols. When we get depressed, we turn to them for comfort. When we're happy, we give them the credit. Before we know it, we not only worship them, we become their slaves. Someone once said that money is a great servant but a terrible master.

Who is it or what is it that is your master in life? Isn't it the thing or person that you love the most? God calls Himself a **"jealous God."** He tells us to love Him with all our heart and soul and strength. When we love money in the way Solomon described, it displaces God as first in our lives and becomes our god.

In addition to citing a love of money as a symptom of greed, Solomon wrote that **"whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income."** This desire that can never be satisfied, is the second symptom of greed. Greed is not limited to the wealthy; you can be dirt-poor and be greedy as well. Some people think they don't have to worry about greed because they have little or nothing. This is really false confidence, because greed is not a matter of what you do or don't have, but a matter of how much you want. Even John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest people in the world during his time, when asked how much money was enough, answered, **"Just a little more."** Most of us think that way. **"If our house had just one more bedroom. If I could just get that raise, I've asked for. Then our problems would be solved; we'd have no more stress."** The root cause of that type of thinking is really greed.

Many people use this line of reasoning when confronted with giving. **"We would love to give more, but we just don't earn enough. When I get that raise, we're going to start tithing. When we get our bills paid off, we'll have something left for the offering plate."** Just a little more, we say, but Solomon warns that we'll never be satisfied.

What happens if you take paper money, the kind most of us want, and throw it on a fire? The flames burn higher, don't they? Many people think that just a little more money will put out the fire inside them. It may be the fire of fear or insecurity about their futures. It may be the fire of stress about financial problems. It may be the fire of loneliness or depression, but the fact is that greed, which is fueling this fire, will continue to feed the fire. Instead of being extinguished, that fire will burn all the hotter inside of you.

Solomon called that **"meaningless,"** in other words, emptiness. If you are experiencing emptiness already—if your money is actually bringing disappointment instead of fulfillment, you are experiencing that third symptom of greed: meaninglessness. Throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon discussed ways of filling the void in our lives. In this section, he talks about money. You may hear some say, **"Well, I know people say money isn't everything, but I'd like to find that out myself."** Take it from a man who had it all and concluded that money definitely isn't everything. It cannot fill that void. It leaves us still feeling empty.

Now, if you are experiencing any of these symptoms of greed—if you have an unhealthy attachment to money, if you are never satisfied with what you have, if you find yourself feeling empty—you must be asking, **"What's the cure?"**

Our wise teacher, Solomon, as he reflected on the danger of greed, began to realize what the cure is. He wrote in verse 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. 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. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart."**

Solomon's recommendation to us is that we learn to enjoy our work and all the gifts God has given us. Then God will enable us to accept our lot. God will bring us contentment. Paul wrote to Timothy, **"But godliness with contentment is great gain."** Knowing that God will provide all we need and being content with what God sees fit to provide is great gain. Solomon called it **"accepting our lot."** Jesus told us not to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear, because our heavenly Father knows what we need. In fact, Paul continued in verses 17-18 of 1 Timothy 6 to admonish and encourage us by writing, **"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God Who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."**

God's greatest gift to us is the gift of His Son Who has accomplished for us our salvation. We need nothing else, but God desires to richly provide us with **"everything for our enjoyment"** besides! **"He Who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"** asked the Apostle Paul in Romans 8:32.

Solomon offered another solution to our problem of greed. He said that **"God keeps [us] occupied with gladness of heart."** **"Gladness of heart"** goes beyond contentment to gratitude. As recipients of God's grace, our hearts well up with gratitude. We realize that we are sinful beings completely undeserving of that grace; we realize that God owes us nothing. We realize that everything we are and have comes from God's gracious hand.

How grateful are we to our gracious God? How grateful are we for the gift of His Son? How grateful for His Spirit, Who works in us through Word and Sacrament, to bring us to faith, to convict us of sin, to draw us to Himself? In addition to our verbal expressions of thanks, how do we show our gratitude but by joyfully giving back what we have received? The Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the joyful response of the Macedonian churches whose **"overflowing joy ... welled up in rich generosity."** He urged the Corinthian church, who excelled **"in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in [their] love ..."** to **"see that [they] also [excelled] in this grace of giving."**

The more we truly believe that all we have are gifts from God, the more thankful we will be. Our thoughts will be concentrated on what we have received instead of what we thought we needed or wanted. Instead of thinking of giving as an obligation, we will see it, as the Macedonians did, as a **"privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."** With **"gladness of heart,"** we will also **"excel in the grace of giving."**