

Satisfaction Not Included
Ecclesiastes 5:8-6:12

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Chasing the Wind

I want to begin this morning with a question. Don't answer out loud, but I wonder how many of you can recall a time in your life when **money was harder to find but happiness was easier**? Isn't it strange that, all contrary to the product ads we hear every day, satisfaction in life is found elsewhere than wealth and possessions?

Reminds me of a story I read a few years ago...

A vacationing American businessman was standing on the pier of a fishing village in Mexico when a small boat glided up and docked. Inside was one fisherman with several large tuna. "Nice fish. How long were you out?" the American asked. "Oh, a few hours," the fisherman replied. "Why not stay out longer and catch more fish?" The Mexican answered: "This will be plenty to meet my family's needs today." "So what do you do with the rest of your time?" The fisherman smiled, "I sleep late, play with my kids, take time for a siesta with my wife. In the evening, we stroll along the beach or I go into the village to see my friends, play the guitar, sing songs..." The businessman got serious: "OK, listen, I have a business degree, and I think I could really help you out. You need to get up early and fish all day, so you'll catch more. More fish means more profit. Soon you'll be able to buy more boats and hire helpers. Before long you'll have a whole fleet of fishing boats, maybe even build a cannery of your own for processing. Then you could start working on distribution. You could leave this little village and move to Mexico City, where you could really expand!" The Mexican had never had such grand thoughts: "How long would this take?" "Oh maybe 15-20 years. But here's the really great part. When the time is right, you could sell the business and get rich. You could make millions!" "Wow. Then what would I do?" "Well, you could move to a quiet little fishing village, sleep late, play with your grandkids, take time for a siesta with your wife. In the evening you could stroll along the beach or hang out with your friends, play the guitar, sing some songs..."

Money has a strangely seductive power, doesn't it? We all know it can't buy happiness, but it's like we still want to find that out for ourselves. It's the subject the Preacher turns to in this morning's text—the different attitudes we take toward wealth and money.

Ecclesiastes presents in stark clarity the two ways to live. **Either you will find meaning in life in a relationship with God, or you will try to find it everywhere else... and fail.** "He has put eternity in our hearts," and we

know instinctively that we were made for something more than this life here "under the sun."

It's important to remember the unusual strategy this book utilizes to teach us these lessons. The main character is a person called "the Preacher," and Ecclesiastes is essentially his personal journal of discovery as he goes through life recording everything he could learn about the meaning of life—not from God or the Bible—but on his own, using just his own 5 senses as his source of truth. **In other words, the Preacher believes in God, but he assumes the identity of someone who doesn't.** He gets to the end of his journey and says to us: "Here's the sum of it all: Fear God and keep His commandments." But before that, the whole rest of this book asks: "What if I don't?" His answer: Vanity of vanities. Trying to find meaning in life without reference to God is like chasing the wind.

In today's text, he turns his attention to wealth and money. In the history of humanity, accumulation of goods & wealth has always been a great rival to God for first place in our hearts. Consumerism is part and parcel of our modern, materialistic world—arguably the religion of our age. How fitting then that the Preacher follows up a discussion of religion (5:1-7) by addressing wealth. Three ways money replaces God:

- Money as treasure
- Money as security
- Money as master

Money as TREASURE: "Money makes me happy."

The Preacher first turns his attention to the plight of those with no material resources, the poor:

5:8-9 *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. ⁹ But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.*

Contrary to what you might think, the Bible takes quite a favorable view toward money—as we'll see in a moment. On the other hand, the Bible never views material poverty as good; instead, it admits the awful

burden the poor must carry, often through no fault of their own—as though they are being punished for a sin they didn’t commit. Here the Preacher observes that, when it comes to the structures of civil society, the poor are playing with a deck already stacked against them. The system is rigged—and not in their favor. Sure (v8), “high officials” have “higher officials” over them, but they are all part of the same organization—same loyalties, same self-protective agenda. “Don’t be amazed at injustice and oppression,” the Preacher says. “The poor aren’t facing just one rascal in power who decided to take advantage of those less fortunate; they’re facing a whole system of oppression, rigged against the people who need it most.” Verse 9 is puzzling, but it seems to be saying that any form of orderly human government is better for people than absolute anarchy.

Systemic injustice only one aspect of a life in poverty, and it highlights what a terrifying prospect it is to try to live without adequate material resources. It’s no wonder so many of us turn to money for meaning in life. But there’s a problem with that approach:

5:10 *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.*

The problem here isn’t the money itself; it’s making money the center of your life—“love.” As soon as you make money and wealth THE love of your life, you destine yourself to a fruitless, frustrating quest. It doesn’t matter how much money you make or how much wealth you have, you will never be satisfied. The problem isn’t the amount; the problem is the thing itself. As Groucho Marx supposedly said: “Money can’t buy happiness, but it certainly lets you choose your own form of misery.” The love of money is like an addiction—it grows as we feed it, but it’s never satisfied. It leaves us empty. Why? Because we were made with eternity in our hearts, and we need better nourishment than this (Kidner 56).

Plus, wealth brings additional problems: new “friends” and new worries:

5:11 *When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?*

As soon as you have a little extra cash, a new toy, some other expression of wealth, freeloaders show up out of nowhere. You’ve worked hard and saved well. You have a little extra, so they act like you owe them. And your surplus vanishes before you can even enjoy it.

5:12 *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.*

Here’s the guy who eats so much, he can’t sleep. His surplus is the rich man’s undoing—his overeating causes under-sleeping. What an indictment! We’re the same way—we spend more than we need so we can eat more than we should, making us weigh more than we should, so we spend more to get fit than we’d need if we’d just eat less in the first place. Our wealth hurts us going and coming.

So what about it—will money really make you happy? “Let’s be honest,” the Preacher says. “If you make money your life’s main treasure, all you’ll find is vanity” (v10).

Money as SECURITY: “Money keeps me safe.”

This is the person who looks to money to provide stability and shelter. They know the world is a dangerous place (cf. the plight of the poor in v8), and they think wealth will be their castle of protection. How does that work out?

5:13-16 *There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept 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.¹⁵ 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?*

Here’s a guy whose wealth is lost in a “bad venture” (v14). The Hebrew word is simply “work” or “business,” i.e., “misfortune” (NIV). It’s not necessarily a risky/foolish investment but rather a business that simply went bad beyond his control—the market crashed, the business failed, a lawsuit happened. It’s the guy who says, “All I wanted was to work hard, make sacrifices, save, and have a little something to pass on to my kids.” Sound familiar? Even that, the Preacher says, is asking more than life under the sun can give. **There’s no security in money.** None. Ever.

The Preacher makes two additional observations here about the vanity of making money your security: 1) It can’t protect you from the inner turmoil of life and 2) It can’t protect you from its own influence.

5:17 *Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and*

sickness and anger.

You can't take it with you when you're gone (v15), and even when you have it, it can't protect you from the worst torments in life—vexation, sickness, anger. Money can't solve your people problems, your health problems, or your emotional problems. It's a pitiful source of security.

Notice what happens to you when you make money your security:

5:13 *There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt...*

Hoarding harms the hoarder. Money has a way of shriveling the soul when it is stockpiled. cf. Scrooge:

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

If you make wealth your security, it will corrupt and shrink you—much worse than the emptiness of the “money as treasure” attitude. In fact, I want you to notice the deterioration/downward trajectory as the Preacher takes us through these attitudes toward wealth:

- money as treasure = “vanity” (5:10)
- money as security = “a grievous evil” (5:13,16)
- money as master = “vanity, a grievous evil” (6:2)

There's a worsening effect as we move further into these different attitudes toward money—less benefit, more misery. But before we get there, we read this...

Money as GIFT of GOD

5:18-20 *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. 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. ²⁰ For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.*

Why the dramatic change in tone? As we've seen several times before in this book, everything changes with the appearance of GOD.

Here is the right attitude to have toward money and wealth: receive it as a good gift from God! The problem isn't money in itself; the problem is in our attitude toward it. Money makes a wonderful gift but a terrible god! As with all God's other gifts, we spoil it when we try to get more out of it than it can offer. But when God is your God, you get to truly enjoy everything else:

v18 *...good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment [your] toil*

v19 *God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them... this is the gift of God*

v20 *...God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart*

Verse 20 can be a little confusing, but I take this whole section as the Preacher's affirmation of a genuine gift from God. There's a way to “remember the days of your life” that is unhelpful—brooding, pining, always dwelling in the past. That's what I think he means when he says “he will not much remember the days of his life”—the Preacher views it as a blessing to be fully “in the moment,” fully absorbed with the now, occupied with the joy of this occasion right here, not comparing it to the past or worrying about how long it will last. Just be here. Feel this moment. Count your blessings right now. THAT mindset is a blessing from God.

The attitude toward wealth which the Preacher recommends is... actually, it's not an attitude *toward wealth* at all, but rather a certain attitude *toward God*: open hands, a readiness to take whatever He gives as heaven-sent, whether toil or wealth or both.

Money as MASTER: “Money runs my life.”

Finally, we come to the worst attitude to have toward money:

6:1-6 *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. ³ 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. ⁵ Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. ⁶ Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good - do not all go to the one place?

The Preacher considers this next issue to be a really significant problem. He calls it “an evil” that “lies heavy on mankind” (v1). It is both “a vanity” and “a grievous evil.” In vv3-5 he uses the extreme comparison of a stillborn child and concludes that even that life is better off than the man in this situation. What’s the problem? A guy who’s so poor, all he has is money.

In 5:19, the Preacher says it’s a gift to have the “power to enjoy wealth and possessions.” Here, he elaborates on that by pointing out what a tragedy it is to have things and lack the power to enjoy them. The Preacher doesn’t explain why or what goes wrong, but you get the distinct impression that this guy has everything but never stops to enjoy any of it. He’s driven by the sheer accumulation of wealth or the thrill of career achievement. He’s an utter slave to Lord Wealth:

- v2 he “lacks nothing” – wealth, possessions, honor. He’s got it all. Other people enjoy his acquisitions, but not he.
- v3 He has 100 kids and a long life but “his soul is not satisfied with life’s good things.” He just won’t stop to enjoy it. “He also has no burial” – i.e., this guy won’t even spend money on his own funeral.
- v4 “it comes in vanity” = the “stillborn child” of v3—the lifeless body of an infant whose whole “experience” of life is darkness. The Preacher considers this “life” better off than the man who has great wealth, 100 children, and lives 1000 years twice over. Why? Because the stillborn child “finds rest”—the stillborn child’s existence was tragic and peaceful, but this man’s existence was only tragic. No peace. No joy. No rest.
- v6 “do not all go to the one place?” Everyone’s life ends in death. The stillborn child has no separation in time between birth and death. If you’re going to experience a gap in there, what gain is there in filling your days with “enjoying no good”?

Wealth for wealth’s sake. Utterly driven by Lord Wealth, answering to his every whim, fearing his displeasure, giving the best years of our lives to serve him perfectly. There are kids at home, but they never get played with. Vacation time rarely taken. Everything is 80-hour work weeks, career advancement, and dedication to the job.

Notice what the Preacher says about that. It’s life on the hamster wheel:

6:7 *All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.*

We work so we can eat, so we can work so we can eat... We might think, “No, there’s more to life than this. We can be wise or have friends...”

And the Preacher says, “That makes this problem better how?”

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?*

We’re all ants in an anthill, feverishly working but getting nowhere. It all means nothing.

6:9 *Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.*

Might as well dance with the girl you brought. Better to be satisfied with what you have. “Dreaming about nice things” (NLT) is chasing the wind.

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.*

Everything is foreordained anyway (v10). No sense making a fuss about it (v11). His point through this section seems to be: Just be content with what you have. Our appetites are insatiable, so be content (vv7-9). We can’t change our God-appointed destiny, so just accept it (vv10-11).

The chapter ends with a string of unanswered questions:

6:11-12 *The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? 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?*

What’s the advantage of that? Who knows? Who can tell? This is life under the sun—no sure values, no future certainties. Utter vanity.

Let’s sum up the Preacher’s message: Wealth makes a wonderful gift, but a terrible God. Love it as your treasure and it will leave you unfulfilled. Trust it as your security and get ready for a life of risk and uncertainty. Serve it as your master and you’ll be worse off than if a stillborn infant. But if you accept it as a gift from God—not your ultimate joy, but a source of some joy; not your ultimate security but enjoying its benefits, not serving it as your master but receiving what you have with contentment—this is “good and beautiful.” Money is a gift, freely given by a good God.

But how can you know for sure—how can we be sure God is a more satisfying treasure, a more certain security, a better master than

money? Look at the gospel! God gave up His most precious gift—His Son! Paul puts the gospel in explicitly economic terms just for questions like this:

2 Corinthians 8:9 *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

Yes, money is a good gift from our gracious God, but the gospel tells us it's more than that. Money is a test—a test to see how well we truly understand whether God is for us or against us.

In the gospel, Jesus of Nazareth comes to us and says, "I paid the full debt of your sin. I now offer you the priceless wealth of my righteousness. All you need for joy, for security, for purpose—all that is here in me. But I ask you: will you trust me?"

See friends, at the heart of all our concerns about money is a question of trust—the need for security, the desire for delight, the quest for significance. Will I trust God to provide those for me in Christ? Jesus is my Savior. He is my Treasure. He is my Lord.

Hebrews 13:5-6 *Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." ⁶ So we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?"*

The Preacher ends his exploration of money with a series of dark, derisive questions. It's the best we can do if we approach life without reference to God. But if the gospel is true, it confronts us with a whole host of new questions, like:

- If God is for us, who can be against us?
- He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
- Who is to condemn?
- Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
- The Lord is my helper; I will not fear, what can man do to me?

Amen?