



KIAMA ANGLICAN CHURCHES

Whoever Loves Money

Sermon Series: Ecclesiastes
Ecclesiastes 5:8 to 6:9

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Whoever Loves Money - Ecclesiastes 5:8 to 6:9

Riches are meaningless – wealth won't satisfy!

On my way to work and back home again I can see a large house sitting on top of the hill above the Minnamurra river. Commonly known as the abandoned Minnamurra mansion, it looks majestic, lonely, a real life example of hopes and dreams gone like smoke. A google search easily gives us the background and it's not pretty. Bad business deals, corruption and greed, bankruptcy, good things turned bad. I don't personally know the family who built the house, so I can't comment on their actions, motives and dreams. But I can safely say that our cultural narrative on wealth and possessions would have been right up there for them.

Having things will satisfy!

Being happy is what life is all about!

Money can get you things!

So go as hard as you can to get things and you will be happy.

I find myself a sympathiser to this story, if I am honest. I sometimes look at the Minnamurra mansion and think of my own treasures on earth. It's kind of like a comparison point – I'm doing well, thanks very much, or, wouldn't it be great to have that view!

Life 'under the sun' has a simple but twisted story line – our basic needs like food and drink and sleep need to be met. If there's money left over from our work, then we accumulate what we value, what we think will satisfy. And in our online shopping world there's endless choice – the marketing message is everywhere. Things make you happy, so get things.

This message is not for just the middle-class person ready to enjoy retirement. It's for children, for school leavers wondering what their life should concentrate on. It's for the aged, for the young, for the single, for the family. It's a message across the world. It's an old, old message.

The writer of Ecclesiastes considers the same things and concludes that this story line is faulty, that if we only set our eyes on things 'under the sun' then we will find ourselves trying to hold on to smoke. We will look around and be sick to the stomach with the random meaninglessness and grievous evil of it all. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on riches and the Teacher reflects on the question, "Will money make you happy?"

The way this section of Ecclesiastes is written is almost like looking at a mansion on a hill – in verses 8 to 17 of chapter 5 the journey towards it is full of injustice, random disappointments and shattered dreams.

Then in verses 18, 19 and 20 the view changes and we see beyond 'life under the sun' towards life with God. But as if to make sure we didn't miss the point, the Teacher looks once more in chapter 6 verses 1 to 9 to life under the sun - meaningless and a chasing after the wind. It's a deliberate style of writing and it's worth us noting as we come to look at these proverbs, reflections and anecdotes.

I think it's important at this point to cut to the chase – "what's wrong with money?" Is it good, bad or neither? What does the Bible have to say? When Paul writes to Timothy "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" what does he mean? There are a few key points for us to look at and then we will spend some time in our verses in Ecclesiastes.

John Piper helps us here; he says that money is simply a symbol that stands for human resources. Money stands for what you can get from another person. It's a means of exchange to get what we need and want. And when we put our trust, confidence and assurance in what human resources can offer, then that's having faith in money, loving money. It's banking on a human resource. It's a heart issue, an orientation of what we look at, desire and trust in.

And why is this a big problem when it comes to trusting in the goodness of God? Why does it challenge Paul's charge in 1 Timothy to be content with what God gives, or does not give?

The biblical story is deeply honest about human rebellion against our creator. The human attachment to material things is one of the primary barriers that exists between God and his human creatures. This theme travels from beginning to end in the Bible.

In Deuteronomy, straight after the 10th commandment against desiring what you do not have, Moses writes in Deuteronomy 8 about entering Canaan, the 'good land...where you will lack nothing'. He warns the Israelites not to forget their good and generous God and instead say to themselves 'my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me' (v 17).

Proverbs 30 verses 8 and 9 pick up the same theme:

...give me neither poverty or riches,
But give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise I may have too much and disown you
And say" who is the LORD?"
Or I may become poor and steal,
And so dishonour the name of my God.

John Piper takes this idea of our heart orientation and writes "you can't trust in God and money at the same time". "the love of money, or trust in money, is the underside of unbelief in the promises of God. God deals in the currency of grace, not money."

And this is the heart of the passage today in Ecclesiastes. If we give our devotion to wealth, to money, to riches, then we can't worship God and enjoy his good gifts. Our view is blocked. We will not find the satisfaction we are made for. We will ignore, reject or forget God. And life will be meaningless under the sun.

But there's good news... There's a different view. A view to take our attention. A view to orient all our life towards, a view to stand right in the middle of.

You know the question – what do you want first – the good news or the bad news. Sorry everyone, the Teacher is a realist and hits us with the bad news first. Let's work our way through the verses.

Chapter 4 verse 1: "I saw the tears of the oppressed – and they have no comforter: power was on the side of their oppressors – and they have no comforter."

Chapter 5 verses 8 and 9 give us one reason for injustice. And we are not to be shocked by this. A society based on the accumulation of wealth will have everyone out for their cut and the weakest will be forgotten.

"For one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still."

If you have watched the TV documentary series 'Filthy Rich and Homeless' on SBS then you will have some idea of how power and authority are twisted for gain and the powerless end up hungry and homeless. The verses are difficult to interpret easily and maybe the king looks over all to keep some kind of control, or the king may even be in on the rip off. Whatever the causes, the end result is poverty.

Verses 10 to 12 are about the vanity of having lots of money.

Verse 10 picks up our theme on loving money. The teacher puts it in a proverb, "Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income."

Prosperity does not satisfy. There's still the desire for something more.

Verse 11 points to the next problem with money – that the more we have, the more others try to take it from us! This could be taxes, scammers and scalpers, relatives crying poor, the demands of a large family. And then it will be gone before we ever had the chance to enjoy it.

Money will give us worry. It will keep us up at night. Verse 12 gives us the example of someone who uses his or her hands to work – and even though the pay may just be enough, the sleep will be sweet.

How many stories of lost wealth do we see? Maybe we have experienced it ourselves. This can make us sick to our stomach – a grievous evil under the sun.

Verses 14 to 17 are about wealth lost, firstly to selfish hoarding. This was against the clear Old Testament commands of generosity, of sharing wealth with family, strangers, the poor and the widowed. The end result? Harm to its owner.

The second result is wealth lost through misfortune. Fires, floods, stock market crashes, viruses, accidents and illness - there are any amount of ways riches can vanish...and there's nothing left for those who are left. This is not how it should be...and the teacher calls it meaningless, an evil under the sun.

The end result is the tragedy of our mortality. After all this striving to accumulate things that money can buy, we cannot even hold one thing in our hand on the day we die. As we are born, so too we depart.

And so the despair of verses 16 and 17 hits us. The pursuit of wealth without God will leave frustration, affliction and anger. Derek Kidner writes, "If anything is worse than the addiction money brings, it's the emptiness it leaves." Where eating a meal is meant to be with family, friends and a celebration, the end result of banking on riches for satisfaction is aloneness. What a pathetic picture.

Chapter 6 verses 1 to 9 almost mirror these reflections and parables. Wealth enjoyed but then taken by a stranger, wealth gathered for good things but never enjoyed, and the irony of working hard but never being truly satisfied. There's a very stark and troubling illustration in verses 4 and 5 - but I think the intent is that the rest, the peace that comes to a stillborn is sweeter than the dissatisfaction of a long life spent chasing satisfaction through wealth.

Well, the view has been pretty ordinary so far. Depressing, troubling, and a pretty poor advertisement for capital gain. Thank goodness we have the view in the middle.

In 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 17, Paul writes:

“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.”

The astounding thing about the Christian faith is that it is not about having our needs met, or following rules. It's about looking to a gracious God for our enjoyment. Wealth can buy many things, but satisfaction is sold separately.

Joy. Peace. Not being alone. Not a perfect or an easy life, but contentment in a different kind of wealth. And this wealth is a gift. Look at Ecclesiastes 5 verse 18 to 20. God gets a mention four times here. He's the mansion on the hill, the orientation of our view, the destination rather than the quick glance out the window.

“This is what I have observed to be good: that it is right for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labour under the sun during the few days of life God has given them – for this is their lot. As well, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil, this is a gift of God. They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them with gladness of heart.”

Did you hear the promises? Satisfaction, joy, happiness, gladness. What an antidote to ‘affluenza’! The Teacher is saying, “Depend on God for our enjoyment rather than depending on one of his many good gifts.” And one of his many good gifts is wealth. Money is to be used as a gift, not worshipped as a god. We are now stewards of the gift from God, and we use it to bless others, to help the needy and poor, to hold onto lightly. This Providence of God is for those who trust in him, and sits alongside the providence of God for all his creatures – that this life, though corrupted by sin, is under his control.

Paul finishes the chapter in 1 Timothy 6 with verses 18 and 19:

“Command them (wealthy believers) to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.”

Can you see Paul's view? His orientation? It's heaven. The sobering challenge for us today is not to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth, but to set our hearts on the things that last.

As I finish, I want us to look at another hill. Instead of an abandoned mansion...it has a wooden cross. Instead of shattered dreams...it has the fulfillment of God's plan to save. Instead of a grievous evil...it points to an incomparable triumph.

It is the hill of Jesus' death, where he gave his life in place of our greedy sin and now offers us true life. The joy and happiness that the Preacher in Ecclesiastes pointed to is found in God's ultimate gift – his Son, Jesus. He is the full and overflowing life, the living water, the daily bread. Make him your view, your destination, your rest.

Trust in the love of God, not the lure of money. If you have not looked to Jesus yet, make it today. Talk to someone about accepting him as your treasure. He will never disappoint.

Thank you, God for your good and generous gifts. Help us in the power of your Holy Spirit to be content with what we have, to use our money for your glory and to trust in your promises of life in all its fullness through Jesus. In his name we pray...Amen.