

Daily Bible Study

“Filthy Rich”

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

June 9 – June 15, 2013

MONDAY –We continue our study this week and take as our text, **Ecclesiastes 5:8-20**. In this passage we see Solomon speak of the ultimate folly of a life spent trying to amass wealth. We will see among other things that it leads to corruption, despair, gloom, misery and joylessness. Solomon drops the reminder of death in **verse 15** which stands as the ultimate slap in the face to a person who spent their life hoarding riches and chasing the “almighty dollar”. The preacher will call us to work hard and enjoy the blessings of God and the days He gives to enjoy them in. This portion is centered around wealth with the majority of the text showing us the many dangers surrounding an improper view of wealth, money, and God’s provisions. The wrong thinking of, view of and handling of wealth and money can quickly lead a man into corruption and sin; hence our title, “*Filthy Rich*”. **Ecclesiastes 5:8-20**: *“If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them. Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field. He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes? The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep. There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt. But those riches perish through misfortune; when he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother’s womb, naked shall he return, To go as he came; And he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a severe evil—just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind? All his days he also eats in darkness, And he has much sorrow and sickness and anger. Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.”*

Suggestion for Prayer: God, teach me this week from Sacred Scripture. Help me realize that wealth is a gift from You but it must be understood rightly, used rightly, placed in its proper place. Keep me from loving money and the things it can buy and get me more than You.

TUESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 5:8-9**: *“If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them. Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field.”* As we jump into the text verse by verse we find a warning concerning corruption in high places of leadership; specifically government. We are told not to be shocked if we see corruption such as *oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness* because Solomon points out that all the levels of bureaucracy seem to set up the fallen man for looking out for himself and abusing his power. It seems he says if fallen people have opportunity and are tempted to enrich themselves by abuse of political power, some will in fact succumb to the temptation. Solomon tells us (and he would know) with the phrase *high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them* that government officials have what we could call layers or networks for protecting one another and it is very hard to root out their corruption. The last verse here is a bit difficult and many interpretations have been offered. In a positive sense, some see the phrase, *Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field* could mean that in spite of the corruption there is still a king ruling in the land. Not being so optimistic, the more likely interpretation is that the king himself is part of the corrupt system that “feeds” (*serves*) him.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me remember that the powers that be are ordained by You (Romans 13) and help me be faithful to pray for my leaders that they would rule righteously.

WEDNESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 5:10-12**: *“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity. When goods increase, They increase who eat them; So what profit have the owners Except to see them with their eyes? The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.”* These verses are pretty clear and straightforward and we will discuss them momentarily. Most people cannot even imagine immense wealth. The recent “powerball” lotto winner of some estimated 590+ million dollars pales in comparison to king Solomon. We can find many wealthy people; for instance, Bill Gates is estimated to be worth 72.7 billion dollars, making him the richest man in the world (ABC News-May 17, 2013). The children of Sam Walton (Walmart) are reported to be worth over 70 plus billion dollars. The numbers can get seriously bizarre and there comes a time when wealth becomes so vast it renders itself meaningless. We see warnings about wealth all through Scripture. Paul addresses those men who would serve the church as he warns the young pastor Timothy, *“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:9–10)*. Solomon here warns the wealthy. First we see the danger of dissatisfaction. *He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver...* Someone once asked John D. Rockefeller, “How much money does it take to satisfy a man?” and he replied, “Just a little

bit more than he has.” Rockefeller was right in a way. A man always will need “a little bit more than he has” because as Scripture says he will never be satisfied when not putting to death the deeds of his sinful nature. Next Solomon tells us that with increased wealth comes increased expense; *They increase who eat them*. Wealth and money bring people out of the woodwork as most lotto winners will all attest to and it also brings added responsibility. We can only imagine how Solomon’s lifestyle—his projects, marriages, servants, bodyguards, etc... consumed his fortune. In the text we see not only dissatisfaction but also sleeplessness. *The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep*. One man labors hard and exhausts himself physically, and whatever he eats is burned up in the process. His work is hard but simple and without consuming cares about his portfolio and fortune he sleeps well. Interesting is the fact the rich man is here contrasted as not being able to sleep although he is not pictured working but worrying. His digestion is a mess and he is wearying himself out, in today’s vernacular, “Chasing the American Dream”. As the song lyric testifies, he’s got “his mind on his money and his money on his mind” and the constant fret and concern robs him of rest and peace. Scholar Roland Murphy said, “It seems as if the riches that the eyes contemplated so avidly now keep them from being closed in sleep.” What Solomon does here in this section of Scripture is demolish several of the myths that people hold about wealth thus actually robbing themselves of the blessings God. “*Take heed and beware of covetousness,*” warns Jesus, “*for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses*” (Luke 12:15).

Suggestion for Prayer: God, save me from covetousness and greed. Keep me from believing lies about wealth. Thank You for blessing me with meeting my needs and far more. Let me with food and clothing be content. For as You say, Godliness with contentment is great gain.

THURSDAY – Ecclesiastes 5:13-17: “*There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt. But those riches perish through misfortune; when he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand. As he came from his mother’s womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a severe evil—just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind? All his days he also eats in darkness, And he has much sorrow and sickness and anger.*” Solomon keeps destroying the myths about money. Ask yourself how many of these myths you believe. What we are seeing here in the opening verses of this section is Solomon speaking about anxiety; *Riches kept for their owner to his hurt*. It is truly a severe evil. He hoards to the point of causing suffering to himself. The man bent on accumulating wealth and achieving “the dream” at any price has no satisfaction, peace and sleep as we have seen and now we find he has already lost his wealth in his mind. He is a worried man. British journalist Bernard Levin once described John Paul Getty as someone who “went about looking like a man who cannot quite remember whether he remembered to turn the gas off before leaving home.” This is not how God has called us to live Beloved. As

Psalm 127:2 says, “*It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.*” We need to put to death the sinful greed in our hearts and minds before greed takes over control. We must be diligent to exercise control and observe the warnings and commands of **Proverbs 23:1–5**. Wealth is such an insecure basis for genuine happiness; it is so easily lost in “a bad business venture” as Solomon points out (*But those riches perish through misfortune*). Finally, after the anxiety comes the realization of the futility in seeking wealth and worshipping it as god. People are “investing for” or “working for the future”; the question is, “What future”? *When he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand... naked shall he return, to go as he came... he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand*. Hands frantic to grasp the riches of this world will be empty in the grave. Material things must remain behind; we brought nothing in—we will take nothing out (**1 Timothy 6:7**). “Only what’s done for Christ will last.” Wealth disappears at death which serves as a final denial or negation of misplaced human values. These thoughts are also repeated in **Psalm 49:10–12** and in **Isaiah 5:8** the prophets speaks words very hard for us to hear when he says, “*Woe to those who join house to house; They add field to field, Till there is no place Where they may dwell alone in the midst of the land!*” Bottom line here; the mess caused by materialism is simply *laboring for the wind*. It will inevitably take its toll on health, happiness, and even our eternal destiny (**Mark 10:25, Matthew 13:22, Luke 18:18–23**).

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, I see the severe hurt caused by wrong values & misplaced loves concerning wealth. Save me from this danger and help me to lay up eternal treasure in heaven.

FRIDAY – Ecclesiastes 5:18-20: “*Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God. For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.*” Solomon does make sure we understand that wealth is not inherently evil in itself. The root of the problem is in the attitude of the heart and mind. He started by saying things such as *loves silver, loves abundance, riches kept for their owner, labored for the wind but now ends with* which God gives him; for it is his heritage, God has given riches and wealth, the gift of God, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart. Life is wasted when it is spent in a quest for more money and worse still is the fact it produces *much sorrow and sickness and anger*. Nothing is more pitiful than to be wealthy but unable to enjoy it because you don’t love God and enjoy Him most. No amount of money, things, or prosperity can make up for a life without genuine joy. This joy comes when we recognize that all we possess belongs to God, because it comes from God and it’s all His (**1 Corinthians 3:21–23**). There is so much more to say and Lord willing we will go over it this Lord’s Day.

Suggestion for Prayer: God, help me keep focus and emphasis not on the gifts that will destroy me but the giver who sustains me for His glory. Lead me to true contentment and joy in You.