

True Wealth

Ecclesiastes 5:10-20

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

[13] 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? [17] Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.

[18] 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. (ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, AMEN.

This morning, we hear of a life and a kind of love that we all know too well. A toil and a struggle that often times cripples us with angst, anxiety and worry, and that for some leads to depression and difficulty with catastrophic results in families, marriages, workplaces and as our text reminds us, and leads us right to the grave. It is the way of death, the way of sin, the way of Old Adam and the results of Original sin. The love spoken of in Ecc. 5:10-20 isn't the love of God, and neighbor, but the love of money and possessions, or as Jesus puts it in Matt. 6:24 *“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (or money)”*

Luther speaks of this destructive false god mammon in his explanation of the 1st Commandment *“You shall have no other gods.”* And describes it this way:

“Many a one thinks that he has God and everything in abundance when he has money and, possessions;

he trusts in them and boasts of them with such firmness and assurance as to care for no one. [61](#) Lo, such a man also has a god, Mammon by name, i.e., money and possessions, on which he sets all his heart, and which is also the most common idol on earth."

(LC First Commandment)

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes sets before us two ways in our text, the way of death, and the way of life. The way of the law and the way of faith. He begins saying:

"He who loves money, will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income, this also is vanity" (Ecc. 5:10)

Money, or Mammon is a false god, like all false gods or idols, never delivers what it promises, for it is false. This type of idolatry is found in all, both to those who have a lot of possessions, and those who hope in having more possessions. We think to ourselves, if we just, made this much more we would be alright, we would be happy, or if we just did this or that we would be able to keep and hang onto what we have, but we always need more. More would surely satisfy us and keep us happy and safe. However, the Preacher here in Ecclesiastes reminds us, *"When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?"* In other words, the best it gets is, *"Look at all my possessions, all my stuff"* The love of money is insatiable, and leads to the need for more money, it's really no love at all. The real result is not satisfaction, as this god falsely promises, but increased burden, increased worry and no rest, but destruction.

"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." Ecc. 5:12

The one with more money, has more to stress over, more to fear losing, and his loss is devastating. For his trust is in something that is fleeting, and something that he can't take with him beyond the grave. Therefore, Jesus reminds us, *"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?"* (Mark 8:36) and then in our text we hear:

"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. Ecc. 5:15

The rich man, or one who fears, loves and trusts his own money and possessions, is also spoken of in our Gospel reading, where Jesus tells His disciples in Mark 10:23

"How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!"

The issue here, is not the gift of home, possessions, and wealth. It's never the gift that is the real problem, but the sinner who takes the gift and makes it a god. The man or woman born into sin trusts in himself, is self-sufficient, and looks to the work of his own hands for his security and his deliverance. It is no different than Gen 3, where after falling into sin, Adam & Eve make their own way, which is no way at all, but sew for themselves fig leaves to cover their own nakedness and shame. This is the way of false worship, and false gods. This is why when Jesus speaks to rich young ruler, after he falsely asserts that he has kept the Law completely, he tells him

Mark 10:21-22

, "You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [22] Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions". (ESV)

In laying out the future for the one who trusts in himself, his possessions, and in his own work and control, or even trusting in his own illusion of free will, Jesus speaks about the impossibility of salvation for one who continues down this path. Jesus crushes this false god of money and self-effort. False god never save, they will never deliver, for the are false. In fact, Jesus tells us in Mark 10:25

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God."

No set of self-help books, management courses, motivational Ted-talks, or anything else the rich man chooses to do can save him. And like the disciples, we ask *"Who then can be saved?"*

Jesus then answers, *"With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God."* The Preacher in Ecclesiastes asserts the exact same thing as Jesus in describing the way of false worship and likens the struggle to maintain and serve one's wealth as *"toiling or grasping for the wind"* again, this is impossible, but thanks be to God that He does for us what we are absolutely unable to do for ourselves. *"For all things are possible with God."*

In contrast to the way of sin, false worship, and self-effort, we hear of the way that is good, the way of life, the way of faith, which trusts God alone for everything. The life of receiving, where the result is enjoyment and even joy.

"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” Ecc. 5:18-20

The contrast given here, is whether rich or poor, living in plenty or scarcity, it is the gift and the Giver, who is God Himself that brings not only what we need, but the power to enjoy these gifts of Creation. The new man, the one re-created by the Word and Spirit sees all come from the God alone who cares for him. For the SC reminds us that God gives these gifts not on the basis of earnings or worthiness or merit in man, but *“that He provides me richly and daily with all that I need to support this body and life, protects me from all danger, and guards me and preserves me from all evil; and all this out of pure, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy”*

The good news for you today is that Jesus came to seek and save the rich idolater. Jesus came to seek and save the one who worships falsely. Jesus came to seek and save the one who thinks he or she is alright because they have “done their best” and don’t realize that their best is nothing but filthy rags before God. Jesus came to those who say, *‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’* For this is who He calls to Himself, the sinner. This is who Jesus died for on the cross, the sinner. Just as His word of law breaks the proud, the rich, the self-sufficient, so His word of Gospel comes, not to reform the rich man or woman, bring life where the Law brought death. So, it is certainly true that end of the sinner is death, but it is Jesus who is the resurrection and the life. It is Jesus who died in your place for YOUR sin. *“For God has done the impossible, for you! And what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,”* (Rom 8:3) Jesus won for you on the cross, your salvation, the forgiveness of sin, and He gives His victory over sin and death to you in the waters of baptism which Peter says, *“NOW saves you.”* It saves you this very moment from your love of money, from false worship, from all of your sin. The accomplishment of Jesus for you on the cross of Calvary frees you from all of your striving, earning, self-effort and control, and brings you an inheritance that is imperishable, food that satisfies and water that quenches the deepest of thirsts. He has done it all FOR you. This is the way of faith, the way of life, the Way of receiving gifts from the One who delivers the forgiveness of sins to you, and speaks you clean, holy, and His very own, therefore you can toil, work and enjoy under the sun *“because God keeps you occupied with joy in your heart.”* Knowing that it is He that works in you to will and work that which is good. You who were dead in trespasses and sin, idolatry and false worship, but Jesus has made you alive with His Word which creates faith and gives you all of His benefits, forgiveness, life and salvation. Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, and He is YOUR rest. You are saved by grace, through faith and this is not of yourself, but is a gift from God. To Him be the glory forever.

In the Name of Jesus, AMEN.