

STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES (19)
Concerning Prosperity
Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

In this lesson, we continue our study through the book of Ecclesiastes. This has been a monthly study that we began a couple of years ago. We have been examining Solomon's pursuit for the meaning of life, going through this book section by section. His conclusion, introduced in the first few chapters of this book, was that putting your trust in anything in this life is vanity. But a large portion of the book is written in proverb form with various observations about why putting your trust in this life is vanity. In our last lesson we addressed the importance of keeping vows. Today, we notice some lessons associated with prosperity – money is a frequently addressed subject in this book. And we need to heed its warnings. Let's consider Solomon's observations in this section.

I. Rulers are not always honorable (8-9)

- a. We need leaders. We need rule and rulers for the sake of protection, justice and to prevent chaos. Government is ordained by God – see Romans 13:1-7 and we have responsibilities to support governments (1 Peter 2:13-17, Titus 3:1-2, etc.), even when they are corrupt and wicked (unless we are forced to choose between obeying God and man – Acts 5:29).
- b. But understand that many world governments are worldly and driven by selfish pursuits. Solomon addresses that in vs. 8-9.
- c. ***Do not marvel when you see the oppression of the poor, perversion of justice and righteousness*** (vs. 8). Most world governments (and people in positions of power in other sectors of society such as business) are put in place without consideration of God. That is life and when it happens, don't be surprised that they don't care about God and your faith.
- d. ***High official watches over high official, and higher officials over them*** (vs. 8). Most rulers have someone they too will answer to. History shows that the more invincible someone thinks they are, the harder they fall. Consider 1 Corinthians 10:12.
Some describe this process as the "red tape" we continually see – even a corrupt leader has to jump through some hoops to at least APPEAR honorable and caring.
BUT, I believe the ultimate point here is that while "high officials" watch over and have to answer to each other, ultimately all will have to answer to God and give an accounting.
- e. ***Moreover, the profit of the land is for all, even the king is served by the field*** (vs. 9). The NASB reads a little different, "*After all, a king who cultivates the field is an advantage to the land.*"
The point: As a rule, even ungodly leaders provide some general protection from criminal elements. They may also provide sustenance for the people. Furthermore, they are dependent on the produce of the land to prosper and they have to remember that.
In Ecclesiastes 6:1-2, Solomon observes what can happen – a man (or leader) may have great power and wealth, but not be able to enjoy it because it is taken away by a foreigner. This is the uncertainty and vanity of life.
- f. **LESSON:** We may be frustrated with the decisions of our government but know that God is still in control and there will be an accounting. It is even possible in this life, that arrogant

leaders will lose what they have. Our job is to submit to the best of our ability and even to pray for them (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

II. He who loves silver (10-17)

- a. These verses give a number of warnings associated with those who put their trust in wealth.
- b. ***It is never enough*** (vs. 10) – the greedy are not content. They always want more. That is why the pursuit of wealth leads to misery. Heed Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 6:6-10)
- c. ***When goods increase, they increase who eat them*** (vs. 11) – those who have prosperity have many friends, but how many are there only because of the wealth? They are there for a handout, and when that is gone – so are they.

This was likely the circumstance with the prodigal son (Luke 15:13-16)

You might also consider Jesus after He fed the 5000. After Jesus told them they were only following Him for the food, we read in John 6:66, "*From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.*" This is a sad reality of wealth – it attracts all sorts of people and problems. Hear me clearly: Money may buy you company, but it will NEVER buy you a true friend.

But the increase can also mean increase in other areas – debts (isn't it ironic that the one who has wealth is the one more likely to be able to borrow larger amounts, and how many do?) Also with greater wealth often comes an increase in responsibilities, expenses, etc. Think of the lifestyle of Solomon – how many he had to care for every day. Even with great wealth there was a need to keep it coming to sustain that lifestyle. It can become tiresome and stressful. How many who have gained easy wealth blow it all quickly (an often told story associated with lottery and gambling winners, as well as celebrities)?

- d. ***Sleepless nights*** (vs. 12) - Solomon observes that ***the sleep of a laboring man is sweet*** – and it is. There is something to be about one who works hard, lives honorable and humbly and at night goes to sleep knowing he has done the best he could that day. This is especially true for the Christian who knows God is pleased with his day.

BUT, the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep. Those driven by wealth are troubled by it. Either it is not enough, or they are continually worried about what they have being taken away from them. Many lose sleep because of the long hours involved in securing and increasing their wealth.

Could we apply this to our present distress? Are there those whose love of money has them bothered because of what they are losing right now? See also my previous point about increases in other areas.

- e. ***The uncertainty of riches*** (vs. 13-14) – Solomon describes this as a severe evil under the sun, riches kept for their owner to his hurt. The NASB uses the word, "hoarded".

There are few things more tragic than hoarding – someone who has so much but is so selfish and afraid that they won't let go. TV shows have been done about the damage of hoarding – we hoard so much food that it spoils (have some been guilty of this in our present circumstance?), our homes become cluttered and filthy with stuff, much of it useless, etc. And it is not unheard of, that those who hoard their riches lose it so that they have nothing left, NOT EVEN enough to give something to their children as an inheritance.

ONE THING this present distress needs to teach us, is that money and things are unstable.

Almost overnight, fortunes have been drastically reduced and jobs & businesses lost, plans

have changes, and people are having to change the way they go about their lives. There are shortages created for others by the hoarding of some (try to buy a bottle of sanitizer).

The point is to understand that riches are uncertain – PERIOD! Again, that is what Paul warned Timothy about – 1 Timothy 6:17 – command the rich not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches...

- f. ***You can't take it with you*** (vs. 15-16) - Solomon observes that we come into this world naked and we will leave that way. We come with nothing but ourselves and that is all that is left when we die. This is EXACTLY the point Paul is making when speaking of contentment in 1 Timothy 6:6-7. It matters not how much material wealth and possessions you accumulate in this life – when you die you leave it all behind.

We have heard the expression, “He who dies with the most toys wins”. My question is: WHAT has he won? The way I say, “He who dies with the most toys is still dead!”

Solomon DOES make another interesting point: Note vs. 15, “*And he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand.*” Do NOT think that when you die you will carry nothing with you. You will carry the way you lived your life before God in judgment – 2 Corinthians 5:10, “*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*” When Jesus spoke of laying up for yourselves treasure in heaven, He noted there are things you will take with you (Matthew 6:19-21), it just is the stuff that money can buy!

- g. ***Darkness, sorrow, sickness and anger*** (vs. 17) – all of these can be caused by a twisted desire of possessions. Paul in 1 Timothy 6:10 talked about those who have strayed from the faith in greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. These things may also be the result of other causes, but money can cause some to be isolated for whatever reason, and lead to sorrow, worries which lead to sickness and anger as he doesn't get his way. Ad infinitum to this!

III. **Enjoy what you have (18-20)**

- a. Solomon concludes this section by making some good observations.

- b. ***It is good and fitting to eat and drink and enjoy that for which you toil*** (vs. 18-19) - Solomon describes it as his heritage and a gift from God.

We are reminded that enjoying good things in this life is not wrong. If we have labored honorably and it has resulted in blessings, there is nothing bad about that. There are some who want you to feel guilty because you dare to enjoy prosperity while others don't have what you have. While we certainly must not forget to remember the less fortunate, and that we must be content with whatever we do have, and that we are thankful, it is not wrong to enjoy life.

Money is morally neutral. It is not good nor evil – it is about what we do with it and how we view it.

- c. ***He will not dwell unduly all the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with joy in his heart*** (Vs. 20) – this is one who is content and living a balanced life with his priorities as they ought to be. The NASB says, “For he will not often consider the years of his life...” The point being he is not fretting about not having as much as he wants. He's content with what he has right now, enjoys it and his heritage.

And thus we see some of Solomon's admonitions about wealth. We ought not to put our trust in uncertain riches. He will have more to say about wealth, and so will I. But for now, let us learn to live with contentment regardless of where we find ourselves.