

"Wealth"

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Date: 12 October 2025

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. It's good to see you all this morning. Would you turn with me to the book of Ecclesiastes?! That's Ecclesiastes. We're in chapter 5 today. We're going to begin in verse 8 of chapter 5 and continue through the end of chapter 6.

So let me pray, and then I'll read our text for us. Father, we ask that by Your Spirit, You would give us ears to hear what it is You are saying to us today through Your Word.

Father, we remember what the Apostle said about the Scriptures, that they are all breathed out by You and profitable for our good. And Jesus, we remember how You told us that all of Scripture testifies to You.

So help us to know that good and to see You, Lord Jesus, as we meditate on Your Word today. We pray this, Father, in the mighty name of Jesus. Amen.

Amen. All right, Ephesians 5, verse 8 through the end of chapter 6. Excuse me. 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.

[1 : 40] For the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. But this is gain for a land in every way, a king committed to cultivated fields.

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income. This also is vanity.

When goods increase, they increase who eat them. And what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? 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.

There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun. Riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.

As he came from his mother's womb, he shall go out again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand. This also is a grievous evil.

[2 : 47] Just as he came, so shall he go. And what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness, in much vexation and sickness and anger.

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. 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. For he will not much remember the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind, a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor so that he likes nothing of all he desires. Yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them.

This is vanity. It's a grievous evil. 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 : 12] For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good, do not all go to the one place.

All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. 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?

Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. 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.

The more words, the more vanity. And what is the advantage to man? 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? Okay. So, our passage this morning is about money.

[5 : 32] It's about money. More specifically, it's about the love of money, or what we would call greed. Verse 10, look there, that helps to kind of center us.

Verse 10 talks about the one who loves money and the one who loves wealth. But greed, you know, is kind of a funny thing. The sin of greed or covetousness has a way of being very hard to detect in yourself.

Compare that with something like murder. It's easy to know when you've murdered someone, right? It's easy to know when you've committed adultery. It's easy to recognize maybe when you're sinfully angry at someone or when you're lusting after someone in your heart.

But greed is different. Greed is much harder to detect. In Luke 12, Jesus acknowledges this. He says, Take care.

Be on your guard against all covetousness or greed. For one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions. Now, if that were true in the first century when Jesus spoke those words, and if it was true hundreds of years before Jesus when Ecclesiastes was written, how much more is that the case today that we have to be on guard to take care?

[6 : 51] After all, money, profit, accumulation, advertising, this is the air that we breathe. Everything is monetized and sold.

Have you seen the commercials where the kids are graduating from, like, middle school, and the parents have sort of licensed out their name to the local, like, tanning salon and the local insurance broker?

Seems crazy, right? Everything, though, is monetized and sold. Money is sort of the story that we live by. Theologian Susan White describes it this way.

She says, If there's an overarching metanarrative that purports to explain reality in our day, it is surely the metanarrative of the free market economy.

In the beginning of this narrative is the self-made, self-sufficient human being. At the end of this narrative is the big house, the big car, the expensive clothes.

[7 : 52] And in the middle is the struggle for success, the greed, the getting and spending in a world where there's no such thing as a free lunch. Most of us have made this so thoroughly our story, she says, that we're hardly aware of its influence.

Anecdotally, one school teacher observed that years ago, when he asked his students what they wanted to be when they grew up, they would say a profession, a teacher, a lawyer, an engineer. But his observation was that not anymore. Now, the overwhelming answer that he gets from his students is simply, I want to be a billionaire. Just rich.

That's what I want to be. So perhaps we need the message of Ecclesiastes 5 and 6 now more than ever. And I want to point out three things in our text as we consider it today.

The first thing that Ecclesiastes is going to show us is the problem with greed. And then second, it's going to show us the alternative to greed. And then third, the power to overcome greed.

[9 : 05] So the power, excuse me, the problem, the alternative, and the power. That's what we're going to do. So first, let's look at the problem of greed. This is in verses 8 through 17 of chapter 5, 8 through 17.

And there are really two problems that Ecclesiastes highlights with greed. And the first problem is that greed corrupts society. Verse 8 speaks about the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness.

But how did that oppression and violation of justice and righteousness and fairness come about? Was it because there were just a few bad people spoiling it? Was it because some people weren't taking enough personal responsibility?

No, Ecclesiastes says. Greed's actually corrupted the whole system. Don't be amazed at the matter, he says. For the high official is watched by a higher. And there are yet higher ones over them.

Now what does that mean? What is he getting at there? The high official is watched by a higher. Well, the sense of that phrase is that the lower official who's taking advantage of the poor is watched over and protected by a higher official who's also profiting from the injustice.

[10 : 11] And those officials have yet higher ones over them who are also getting rich from the oppression and injustices against the weak and the vulnerable and the marginalized and poor. So greed corrupts the institutions and authority structures all the way up.

And these structures were ones that got originally established to protect the poor and the vulnerable, to ensure that land and resources and labor and wealth would not be amassed more and more by a few while the rest kind of barely get by.

Verse 9 says, The king is supposed to be committed to cultivated fields. That is, protecting the rights of the people so they can work, cultivate their fields, and enjoy the fruit of their labor.

But instead, greed has created layers of injustice where that doesn't happen. You know, in ancient Israel, God even established a system where every generation, roughly, the ownership of land would revert back to the sort of ancestral clans and families that were originally allotted the land. This is what was called the year of Jubilee. And when that happened, debts were canceled, slaves and servants were freed. Basically, the whole economy was reset so that wealth wouldn't just be amassed in the hands of a few, but so that the whole society could flourish.

[11 : 40] And so that the main goal of society wouldn't actually be the accumulation of wealth, but the cultivation of community and mutuality and the worship of God, not the worship of money.

But Ecclesiastes says, Don't be surprised. Greed corrupts. Greed will create societies where the high official is watched over by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them, making sure that the exploitation of the poor goes unchecked, and making sure that the profits continue to flow to those in power.

But greed doesn't just damage society. Ecclesiastes 5 points out a second problem with greed. Greed damages the soul. We see this in verses 10 through 17.

Those who love money will never be satisfied with money, verse 10 says. It'll never be enough.

You'll always want more. And then, verses 11 through 12, Ecclesiastes points out that increasing wealth actually brings more stress into one's life so that one is unable to really enjoy it.

When goods increase, they increase who eat them. In other words, the more wealth you have, the more time and energy it takes to manage it. Or as the rappers would say when I was in middle school, mo' money, mo' problems.

[13 : 09] That was biblical. And the result is that, the result of all this is that you can see your wealth, you can see the large amounts of wealth you've accumulated, but you don't really get to enjoy it.

You have a full stomach, but your full schedule means you never sleep. And that's not all. Verses 13 through 16 remind us that wealth can be quickly lost.

We can build our lives around money. We can form our identities around wealth and what we possess, only to find that when it's taken away, our lives are empty and meaningless.

And even if we die rich, we take nothing with us. And so verse 17 concludes that the life lived for the love of money leaves the soul in a troubled and lost condition.

All his days he eats in darkness, in much vexation, in sickness, in anger. Greed corrupts the soul.

[14 : 22] It's a sickness that leaves us in darkness, vexation, anger. So Ecclesiastes shows us the problem with greed.

Greed comes and makes great promises. Promises is, I'll make you happy. I'll make you prosperous. I'll make you powerful. Instead, it leaves us miserable and broken.

We accumulate more and more and more, but it corrupts the structures of our society and it hollows out our soul. So what's the alternative?

And here's where Ecclesiastes is perhaps a little surprising. You might think that if the love of money was the problem, then the alternative would be to get rid of our possessions, to renounce everything, to live an ascetic life where we reject the material world.

But that's not the true alternative to greed. The most radical alternative to the love of money is not an ascetic renunciation of the material world.

[15 : 35] The real alternative to greed is actually contentment. That's the second main point of our passage.

This is the alternative to greed. Look again at verses 18 through 20. Behold, 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.

Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them and to accept his lot and to rejoice in his toil. This is the gift of God.

For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart. To enjoy what you have, whether it is a little or a lot, in other words, to find genuine contentment, that's the alternative to greed.

Greed. Greed's like a fire that burns and burns and no matter how much fuel you feed it, it always wants more and more. And sooner or later, greed stops caring where the fuel comes from.

[16:56] So it turns a blind eye to injustice, to oppression, to exploitation, to unfair practices, to the people who are hurt or who suffer at the expense of those who are getting wealthier and wealthier. Greed just keeps burning its destructive dark fire.

But contentment is not that way. Contentment is a joy that spreads over all of life. It's like a fresh breeze that can enter the windows and fill the whole house with life and with cool, soothing air.

And the fresh breeze of contentment doesn't depend on the size of the house or the number of cars in the driveway or the number of zeros in the bank account. It finds joy with a little or a lot.

And it finds joy not just in one's own flourishing, but in the flourishing of others. It's not content to just amass all for itself, but has open hands to see others enter into that joy as well.

Contrast the summary statements of these two alternatives, greed and contentment, in verses 17 and verse 20. I like how the New Living Translation kind of captures the sense of each of these texts. Those captive to greed, in verse 17, the New Living Translation says, they live under a cloud, frustrated, discouraged, and angry.

[18:23] But for those who know contentment, verse 20 says, God keeps such people so busy enjoying life that they take no time to brood over the past.

In fact, rather than losing themselves in frustration and anger, in contentment, they find themselves. The Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas once wrote, only in enjoyment does the eye crystallize.

Good continental philosopher. You have no idea what that means. I had to read it like eight times. In other words, it means this. Greed shatters you, breaks you into a million pieces. You're trying to find your satisfaction here and there and here and there and you just get disillusioned.

But the joy of contentment will give you an integrated life. It'll make you whole. It will give you a center. Only in enjoyment does the eye crystallize.

But this immediately pushes us to the third main point of our passage. We've seen that the alternative to greed is the joy of contentment, but where do we find the power?

[19:42] Where do we find the power to actually overcome greed in our hearts and live in true contentment? Chapter 6 kind of raises this question. He says, there's an evil that I've seen under the sun and it lies heavy on mankind, 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's a grievous evil. And then Ecclesiastes does an even deeper thought experiment. This isn't just about losing what you have to a stranger, but listen, he says, let's say you have wealth and possessions and honor and you have a giant family and you live a long time.

What good is any of that if your soul is not actually satisfied with the good things you have? And he says kind of shockingly in verses 3 and 4, it's better not to be born at all than to live a long life and not enjoy the good things you've been given.

And for Ecclesiastes, the greatest problem, the greatest barrier to contentment is the fact that we're going to die. This life will end and everything we've accumulated will not go with us.

So how do we find satisfaction? Where does the power of contentment come from in the face of all that? Where do we find a satisfaction not dependent on material things so that we can actually turn and enjoy the created realities of this life?

[21:27] You know, as we turn to the New Testament in Philippians chapter 4, the Apostle Paul says something very interesting. He says, in verse 11 of chapter 4, Paul found the secret of contentment.

He actually found the power that extinguished the dark insatiable fire of greed and unleashed the life-giving breeze of contentment through his soul and through his life.

What was it? How did he manage to find what the old Puritan theologian Jeremiah Burroughs called the rare jewel of contentment?

Well, Paul's answer was this. I can do all of this through Jesus Christ who strengthens me. Paul's relationship with Jesus Christ was the key that unlocked the secret and the power of contentment. You see, back in Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes, Ecclesiastes actually did see ultimately where contentment comes from. He says it again and again in chapter 5, verses 18 through 20.

[23 : 08] He says, this is the gift of God. It's only in relationship with our Creator that true contentment can ever come to us. You see, greed is a false god telling us to worship money and possessions and promising us happiness and power and security.

But the worship of those created things has brought the opposite. It's actually alienated us from our Creator who's the only source of life and goodness and satisfaction. And only if we're reconciled to God will we have any hope to genuinely enjoy God's created gifts.

Apart from God, we're destined for darkness and vexation and death. But if we could be restored to God, to His love, to His goodness, then we could fully enjoy this world He's made.

One writer put it this way, this connection. He said, where the love of God is firm, full enjoyment of the creation is possible and desirable.

He says, in that place, one is completely in the arms of God and completely in the world. But how is our relationship with our Creator restored?

[24 : 29] By what power are we forgiven of our idolatry and brought back into fellowship with God and with His good gifts? And that's what Ecclesiastes could not see.

He saw where it ultimately came from, but he wasn't so sure how to get there. And that's why the passage ends with questions.

Who knows what's good for man while he lives a few days of his fleeting life which passes like a shadow? Who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? Very honest grappling for Ecclesiastes, God is the answer, but God remains distant.

God is sovereign, yes. God is good, yes. But the mystery of how sinful humans are reconciled to Him stays veiled. And so for Ecclesiastes, the mystery, the power of contentment remains hidden. And that's why the New Testament ought to strike us as such good news. I've learned the secret, Paul says. But this secret, it's not like most secrets because it's not private and it's not hidden.

[25 : 45] And this secret isn't something you have to spend a bunch of money to discover. You don't have to go find the right guru, right, and give them all your money and subscribe to all their YouTube feeds and all this ridiculous stuff to learn how to be content.

You don't have to travel across the world to find it. This secret that Paul's talking about has been announced publicly for everyone to hear. This good news is for everyone and it is heralded to all creation.

It's heralded from the Creator Himself. And this secret costs nothing and it comes to you free of charge.

And the open secret is this, that in Jesus Christ, God, our ultimate satisfaction, has come down and reconciled sinners to Himself through His own work, through His own initiative, through His own purpose and plan.

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, you see, the greedy, the unjust, the dissatisfied, those who are grinding away in vexation and darkness. Because Jesus Christ has come, we can turn away from our love of money and created things and be forgiven.

[27 : 07] And we can know a satisfaction that the love of money could never bring. The satisfaction of God's grace in Jesus Christ, that is what will bring real contentment to your heart.

How so? Because in Jesus Christ, your enjoyment, not only of God's gifts, but of God Himself, will never end.

You know, Ecclesiastes is right. Life under the sun, that is, life without reference to God, is very fleeting. It will not last. And it will end in darkness forever.

But life with God, life in fellowship with God, that life is never ending. The psalmist says of the Lord, in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

And you see, God raised Jesus from the dead to conquer sin and death so that all who turn and trust in Him might also enjoy that satisfaction with God, that reconciliation with God forever.

[28 : 22] Those who are in Christ will be raised with Him on the last day. You see, Jesus' resurrection is the first fruits. It's the promise of what's to come for all who've been united to Him by

faith. This is why the apostles couldn't stop talking about the resurrection because it meant that the veil of death and vanity and emptiness that had been shrouded over the world had been torn.

And torn not just by some spiritual idea, right? The resurrection ripped the very veil of death from creation itself when Jesus rose from the dead.

And that's why Paul can say, I've learned the secret of being content in every circumstance. It doesn't matter if I have a lot or a little.

Paul can say, rejoice. I'm going to say it again. Rejoice. Because in all circumstances, Paul knows that because Jesus has been risen, because God is now His Father, that He is now adopted into this family of the King, all things are working for His good in Jesus Christ.

And if God has given His own Son for us, how will we, how will God not also with Jesus give us all good things?

[29 : 45] Knowing the love of God in Christ is more satisfying than anything this world could offer. But more than that, knowing the love of God in Christ means that this world is God's gift to us to enjoy with contentment.

Ecclesiastes will say it over and over again, work, eat, drink, and give praise to God for His good gifts. Being reconciled to our Creator, now we're finally in a right relationship with the creation. So you see, friends, it's the gospel that dries up greed at the roots. The gospel is the power that brings lasting contentment in God.

As children of God, we know that ultimately all things are ours in Christ. All our labors are not in vain because He's risen. So as we wrap up then, let me just ask, do you know this power?

The power of Jesus Christ to make you content and joyful in all circumstances. You see, His is a treasure that never fades.

[31 : 04] It's an inheritance that can't be taken away. The love of money will always disappoint you. The love of money will corrupt our world and corrupt your soul, but the love of Christ will never let you down.

And for those of us who are Christians, are we walking, are we living in the power of this contentment?

Do our lives demonstrate this joy that is the gift of God secured for us in Jesus Christ? Is our life marked by the kind of simplicity that that brings?

the kind of generosity that comes from knowing the resurrected Christ and sharing His resurrection power. The kind of mindset that Paul talks about earlier in Philippians where we don't consider ourselves better than others, but we consider others better than ourselves and we live to serve others.

All things are yours in Him. One day you'll see Him face to face and you'll reign over a renewed creation. And the songs of joy will know no end. And that resurrection joy, that contentment is ours even now and ought to be permeating our lives.

[32 : 26] You see, because your future is secure, you can live in the present with joy and contentment in all God's gifts to you, whether they're big or small.

eat, drink, and find enjoyment in all the work God gives you to do. of greed, by the resurrection power of Jesus Christ.

God, and for those who have not yet come to place their trust in Christ, Lord, help them to see that the freedom and the joy that He offers is like nothing else.

That free of charge, today, they can be reconciled to their Creator and enjoy His good gifts and most of all, the good gift of Himself, of you, God, the good gift of you.

Lord, grant saving faith. today. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.