

Occupied with Joy

Westview Church | Ecclesiastes 5:8-20 | Pastor Brett Toney | November 9, 2025

Enough Pie

An old philosopher once said, “More is never enough to the man for whom enough is too little.”¹ We find that to be true at the Thanksgiving table and in our work, don’t we? I don’t want “enough”; I want *more*. I want don’t want *enough* pie; I want *more* pie. But “more” will never be enough, will it? “More” will never satisfy. If I can’t be content with *enough*, why do I think I would finally be content when I have *more*? The same carries over into our aspirations for our work, our toil. We can tell ourselves we will be content once we close just one more deal. We will earn enough once we get one more promotion. We will be satisfied once we get enough in the retirement account. But maybe you don’t think of those things, at least not so explicitly. But when you’re stressed or tired, do you find yourself scrolling through the Amazon app to buy yourself a little something? Do you ever bemoan how much easier life would be if the budget just weren’t so tight? If you had the resources to just hire someone to come help with the kids or the laundry or the dishes once a week, then life would be better?

Here in Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon returns to an earlier theme of toil and finding pleasure. Money and wealth can accomplish a lot, yet it can never satisfy. It can never deliver us from the vapor that is life. But here we are, the wealthiest people to live on earth. And that poses a great danger. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve both God and money” (Matthew 6:24). If you will follow Christ in all of life—including with your wealth—if you will worship him not just on Sunday mornings but in all of life with all your heart, soul, and might—if you will guard your steps, you must turn from the false worship that wealth calls us to. It is a mercy for our idols to be toppled, to be chopped down. Solomon takes the axe to the idol of wealth twice here, showing that wealth corrupts and cannot satisfy. Then he shows us how to use

interact with wealth rightly, not as a god but as a beautiful gift. Amid all of our toil, we can and should be occupied with joy, using wealth by finding contentment through God-centered enjoyment of his gifts.

Wealth Corrupts (Ecclesiastes 5:8-9)

But first we need the axe brought down on our idolatry. The first danger of wealth that Solomon draws attention to here is the simple reality that wealth corrupts. Look at v.8-9. That's the simple reality that I think he is pointing to. But these verses are anything but simple. I'm leaning heavily on the clarity of the first part, "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." He's saying when you look out over the landscape of society and perceive oppression and injustice, don't be shocked. Why would you be? We live in sin-tainted world where people do terrible things to people. Unspeakable things. If that surprises you, you aren't paying attention. Get your head out of the sand and take an honest look at the world.

If you make that claim, Solomon, you need to back it up. And this is where it gets hairy. A more direct way of capturing the "why" in v.8-9 is because "high is watched from on higher and higher ones over them. And the profit of land is all this, a king to a field cultivated." The ESV translators provide an unsatisfying footnote, "The meaning of the Hebrew verse is uncertain." So, my best effort is to conclude that Solomon is meaning that oppression happens because of the bureaucracy of society. There are high officials, with higher officials, overseen by others still, going all the way up to the king. They all want a piece of the pie and take their cut from the profits of the farmer doing the work. Wealth corrupts and leads to injustice.

Wealth Can't Satisfy (Ecclesiastes 5:10-17)

This conclusion is supported further by where Solomon goes next in v.10, the love of money. That ungodly, idolatrous love in the hearts of government officials brings oppression in society. And it is deadly as well in all of us. So, in v.10-17, Solomon makes three assessments, three judgments about the peril of wealth. He says the love of money is vanity, vapor, v.10; riches kept by their owner is a grievous evil, v.13; and, leaving this world with nothing is a grievous evil, v.16. The Apostle Paul was not original when he wrote in 1 Timothy 6:10, “The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.” Solomon is making this same point.

How much money does it take to satisfy, to be enough? “Just a little bit more.”² When enough is too little, more won't satisfy. The love of money will never satisfy. The illustration of v.11 is that when there's more to go around, there's more mouths to feed. And the owner can only but look on. We so easily succumb to this. We get a bigger house, bigger yard, another vehicle, more books, more stuff. And guess what? There's more to do, to clean, to upkeep, to dust. And none of it fills the void we're trying to fill. Accumulating more and more, it's a “grievous evil.” This is a phrase used in parallel to *hebel*, vanity, vapor—storing up treasures is a sickening wrong. Riches are kept to the detriment of the owner, v.13. How so? Verse 14-15, the capital is there for some venture that results in all being lost. What was it all for? As you came with nothing into the world, you leave the world with nothing. All of our work, all of our saving, all of our investing, all of our toil—for what? Vexation and sickness and anger.

Is there value in work? Absolutely. But Solomon is taking a brutally realistic look at this world. He isn't focused on the idealism of human potential or the big picture of God's design for

work. He looks at it as it is here and now. The daily grind. If you labor your whole career to have a cushy retirement, you will still die. You may have the prettiest rose garden for those ten or twenty years. And then what? The solution is not found in being a better steward, investing wisely, saving prudently, or making sound business decisions. Will those efforts deliver man from the fate of taking nothing with him when he departs this life? No. Solomon hints at the solution to wisely working with wealth in v.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.” It’s finding contentment in your work and wealth that leads to sweetness, not more.

Wealth is Beautiful (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20)

This contentment is what he draws out more in v.18-20. Solomon says, “Here is what is good and fitting.” However, the word translated “fitting” is more commonly “beautiful” or “handsome.” Solomon is saying that while wealth corrupts and cannot satisfy, there is still beauty in it. There is still good in it. The beauty of wealth is “to eat and drink and find enjoyment.” Amid all your toil in your work, there is a beauty in it. Being content with what you have been given is a key part. And another vital component is to recognize that it is has been *given*. God has given you all the toil for the few days of your life. Verse 19, “God has given wealth and possessions.” But what’s more is that “the power to enjoy them” and the contentment with one’s lot in life and ability to rejoice in your work—all of this too is a gift of God.

All is a gift. Your home, your job, your vehicle, your savings, your tuition payments, your taxes, your year-end bonuses, your enjoyment of any and all of these good things—all of it: a gift from your Father in Heaven. Follow Solomon in a God-centered, glad-hearted, gratitude-induced reception of every good thing. We so easily long for more because we so little think of God. We go about day after day in prayerlessness because we have so little appreciation for our

Father's lavishness. Wouldn't discontentment and the vanity of coveting dissipate like vapor if we had a greater awareness of God's manifold generosity toward us? Every glass of wine would be an opportunity for praise, not abusing it in drunkenness. Every morning of an alarm clock would be a call to worship for the fact that God has given you a body and a job and the abilities to work and image him in this world. Every traffic jam would be a moment not for cursing but praise that your vehicle has brake pads and heat and seat belts. Every automatic deposit into your bank account would be fodder for exulting in the fact that God has done it again—daily bread, provided!

When you go with the Preacher to behold what he has seen, to perceive the goodness and beauty of wealth as physical, tangible displays of God's good provision for you—how dare you use such gifts in corruption and injustice! Why would you ever think of loving money to satisfy you when the Giver of every dollar so generously provides all you need and far more? Why try, like the Israelites in the wilderness and the manna provided each day, to store up more and more and more? Will not your Father give every gift you need? Paul's counsel again echoes Solomon. In the presence of the soul damning danger of the love of money, what does the apostle say? 1 Timothy 6:17, "As for the rich in this present age, charge them ..."—what do you think? Charge them to sell all that they have and give it to the poor? Charge them to not invest or start businesses that are so successful? Charge them to give all their riches away to the church and missions?

No, "charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, *but on God*, who richly *provides* us with everything to enjoy." God gives all—food and drink and all that is good in your toil—he gives it all and the enjoyment of it. I don't know if Paul had Ecclesiastes 5 in mind, but if the Preacher is a hedonistic, despairing nihilist, then so is the

Apostle. Or ... or, they have caught a vision of the grandeur and splendor of God who made and fulfilled every promise in the One who is greater than Solomon. And if God would surely fulfill that promise of a greater Son of David, Jesus Christ, to deliver us from under the futility of this world by redeeming this world, then all these good gifts are just extravagance to be enjoyed.

The Table

Solomon had devoted himself to exploring all the pleasures, all the good, all the beauty that could be attained through toil and wealth. He had it all. Recall that he wrote in 2:10-11, “I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil ... all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” When Solomon went after all that money could buy, all the affirmation and praise wealth can bestow, and made such things *first* things, they failed. They still fail. Wealth corrupts and yields injustice. The love of money produces vexation and sadness and anger.

But that does not detract from the goodness and beauty of abundance. The problem is setting your hope on the uncertainty of riches. Yet when wealth is governed by God-centered gratitude, they can be received and enjoyed as the gifts that they are. And they can lead us ever onward in faith-filled expectation of more—more and better gifts. When God grants through faith the ability to be occupied with joy, our work and our wealth are reclaimed. They are no longer idols but vessels of grace. And like this Bread and this Cup, they provoke us to long for more. Because if the gifts we receive here in the vapor are good and so satisfying, how much more so will those gifts be when we are delivered out from under the sun.

¹Epicurus

²cf. [John D Rockefeller's quote referenced here.](#)