



# MEANINGLESS

## AUDIO DEVOTIONS

### ON ECCLESIASTES

#### Riches Are Meaningless

(Ecclesiastes 5:10-20)

<sup>10</sup> Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. <sup>11</sup> As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? <sup>12</sup> The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.

<sup>13</sup> I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner, <sup>14</sup> or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him. <sup>15</sup> Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand.

<sup>16</sup> This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?

<sup>17</sup> All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger.

<sup>18</sup> Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. <sup>19</sup> Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. <sup>20</sup> He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

Are you and I rich? That depends on our perspective. One of my favorite exercises to do with young people is for them to describe the lifestyles of the richest and most powerful kings and queens, and then compare these to our modern living conditions, food choices, medicine, travel, and entertainment. At the end they inevitably conclude that even a poorer person in America has it far better than the royalty of years gone by. By the standards of world history and of the majority of people living in the rest of the world, we are rich beyond measure. But notice that with his God-given wisdom Solomon neither condemns wealth and luxury nor does he promote an austere lifestyle. Instead, he invites us to be realistic about the traps, limitations, and additional burdens that often accompany riches.

For starters, if you love money, good luck! You are going to be in for a life of heartache because you will never be able to get enough money fast enough. Nor will any amount of money ever be able to buy you true love or friends, happiness, health, peace, protection, or finally, heaven. Moreover, all of us can only be in one place and one time enjoying one thing at a time. We can all only wear one set of clothes, take one bite of food, one breath of air, and see 200 degrees towards our horizon. My grandma lived through the Great Depression and I recall her telling me how she only had three sets of clothes: one to wear, one to wear when the other was being washed, and one to wear to church on Sunday. I have way more than three sets of clothes, but what are the extras doing for me right now? The same could be asked of the piles of food in my pantry, the extra car in my garage, and the zeros in my bank account—absolutely nothing for me or anyone else! These may as well not even exist far as their immediate utility is concerned. Solomon observes that once we have more than we need, all the rest is just a feast for the eyes and our eyes have big appetites that are never satisfied.

Another reason why not to find purpose in your wealth is that riches are readily lost either by squandering, stealing, or unforeseen disaster, and no matter how much money one has piled up, you cannot take even a penny with you past the grave. We come into this world with nothing and we leave with nothing. We are all born equal, and we all die equal. So why wear yourself out running after more money from which we also reap a harvest of

anger, frustration, worry and sleepless nights in the process? Much as our world projects that getting rich is the goal of life, Solomon wonders if the common laborer might have it better, for he eats and drinks and is steadily engaged in his labors and simply enjoys each day as it comes as a gift from God.

For sure the one who loves riches sets themselves up for much grief and disappointment now and emptiness in the end. In Matthew Chapter 13 Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a priceless treasure and a pearl of incomparable price, worth more than anything and all that we own. Under the sun people may toil and worry from sunup to sundown and all night long over their riches, but once we have God's gift of faith, forgiveness, and eternal life in Jesus, we have the most precious treasure that no one and nothing can take away. Then whether we have much or little, we are truly rich—rich in faith, love, peace, and hope in this life and unto eternity.

For your self-reflection:

1. Recall a time when you had little and remember a time when you had much. When were you happier or more content? When was your faith more vibrant?
2. Explain how both rich and poor can fall into the same money traps and temptations (for example: loving money, always wanting more, depending on money, etc.).
3. What practical steps can you take to regularly remind yourself that Jesus and the gifts of God you have through him are your greatest treasure?

Prayer: *Lord God, thank you for all the gifts of soul and body that you have graciously poured out on me through Jesus, my Savior. Help me to love you more than any gift that you give and give me a content heart that sees money as a tool to accomplish good rather than a goal in itself. Amen.*