

What Money Can't Buy

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

Rev. Brian Bill

September 7-8, 2024

This past weekend, Beth and I journeyed from the wilderness of Illinois to the Promised Land of Wisconsin. On Friday night, my dad hosted a Fish Fry and on Saturday morning after driving through Green Bay, we were welcomed to the land of milk and honey by purchasing some fresh and squeaky cheese curds from a cheese factory. As soon as we got back in the car, I tore the bag open and chowed down on the food of heaven. My appetite seemed to be insatiable for these golden nuggets of delight. The more I ate, the more I wanted to eat. After consuming about half a pound, Beth resealed the bag and said, *"I'm cutting you off. You're dangerous."*

I thought about quoting 2 Samuel 17:29 because *"honey and curds"* were brought to David when he was hungry and weary in the wilderness but thought better of it.

After Beth cut me off, I snuck some more before going to sleep that night. Early the next morning, I had some additional curds with a cup of coffee. BTW, as a public service announcement, curds are not meant to be refrigerated. If you do, the squeak will go away. You're welcome.

I ate so many curds that my stomach curdled. After two days, I was finally satisfied. So much so that when we drove by the cheese store on our way home, I didn't stop to buy more (first time ever).

As we continue in our study of Ecclesiastes, we'll see how Solomon developed some indigestion as he sought to find meaning and satisfaction in experiences under the sun.

It's been said there are three things that shouldn't be talked about when you first meet someone: politics, money, and religion. Solomon didn't take that advice in Ecclesiastes 5:8-20. Here's our main idea: *The love of money will not provide meaning in life.*

1. Political solutions are often corrupt. The Preacher brings up politics in verse 8: *"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, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them."* While many

commentators believe this is one of the most difficult passages to understand in the book, at its core, Solomon is saying that no matter how good a government may be, or what political party is in power, poor people are often oppressed and treated unjustly. Solomon is saying we should not be **“amazed”** by this, because human nature is inherently sinful, selfish, and self-seeking.

It was common then, as it is now, for corruption to enter politics, creating a bureaucracy of bribes and bad behavior. A system of checks and balances where officials are watched by those above them should protect and preserve society, but it doesn't always work that way as we saw earlier in 4:1: **“Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.”** While the powerful watch each other, the poor tend to be looked over.

Let's look now at verse 9: **“But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.”** This could mean the king extorted people through high taxes and oppressive policies like we see in 1 King 12:4 when Solomon made their **“yoke heavy.”** Or it could refer to how a king provided stability by caring for fields in a well-ordered way and giving protection to the people. We need stability in government because anarchy is even worse.

Today, we live in a polarized political climate filled with mudslinging and vitriol. 1 Timothy 2:2 calls us to pray for government officials: **“For kings and all who are in high positions.”** Romans 13:1-7 tells us that God sets up governments for our good. During this election season, we're called to participate in the political process while making sure we don't make politics our god.

For some, there is no question who they will be voting for in November. For others, this election poses a dilemma. In response to the common phrase, **“choosing between the lesser of two evils,”** John Stonestreet suggests we should vote to “lessen evil.” He summarized this view in a recent Breakpoint Commentary, **“Voting to lessen evil acknowledges the moral inadequacies of candidates while still seeking to accomplish good through voting. Christ, not politics, is our hope. He's called us to engage, to discern, and to the best of our abilities, uphold good and lessen evil.”** As Chuck Colson often said, **“Salvation will never arrive on Air Force One.”**

Stonestreet also believes that voting in local and state elections is just as important as the presidential race because abortion and other moral matters have been kicked back to the states now.

BTW, Pastor Ray Pritchard will be speaking via video at Second Winders on Thursday. In this video, he will mention an upcoming online class he will be teaching beginning September 24 called, “Stealth Attack.” In this class, he’ll be addressing how spiritual warfare and politics often go together. Go to keepbelieving.com for more details.

The love of money will not provide meaning in life.

2. The pursuit of money is corrosive. After talking about wealth and poverty on a public scale, in verses 10-17, Solomon brings it down to the personal level. I see seven reasons we’re not to live for money.

- **Money will never satisfy.** Look at verse 10: ***“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”*** It’s important to note that Solomon is warning against the **“love”** of money, not with having money or wealth. The word **“satisfied”** means, ***“to be filled.”*** One commentator writes, ***“Our culture tells us the main problem with money is the lack of it. It’s a supply problem. The Bible says the main problem with money is that it is inherently unsatisfying...we expect money to do what it is incapable of doing.”***

Solomon’s net worth has been estimated in today’s dollars at north of \$2 trillion. But even with all those shekels, he got “no satisfaction.” In 1:8, we read the ***“eye is not satisfied with seeing.”*** In 4:8, ***“...his eyes are never satisfied with riches...”*** 6:7 adds, ***“All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.”*** The illusion of obtaining happiness through wealth will ultimately wash up on the shores of meaninglessness.

David Hubbard writes: ***“All the enjoyment of what these people have is clouded by the thought of what they want next. All gratitude for present blessing is overshadowed by the fear of tomorrow’s losses. All generosity may shrivel because the wealthy person is preoccupied not with how he can help others, but with what he can gain next.”***

One author gave this title to his commentary on Ecclesiastes: ***“When All You’ve Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough.”*** I didn’t make it a practice to watch the

Simpsons, but on one episode Homer said these words to his boss, Mr. Burns, “*You’re the richest man I know.*” To which the wealthy magnate replied, “*Yes, but I’d trade it all for more.*” One author calls this a spiritual problem she labels as “*affluenza*,” which is, “*an unhealthy relationship with money.*” A song from the Beatles captures our confused values: “*Money don’t get everything, it’s true; what it don’t get, I can’t use; now give me money, that’s what I want.*”

This makes me think of what happened in Haggai 1:6 when God’s people decided that their possessions were more important than putting God first: “*You have planted much but harvest little. You eat but are not satisfied. You drink but are still thirsty. You put on clothes but cannot keep warm. Your wages disappear as though you were putting them in pockets filled with holes!*” (NLT)

- **More income brings increased appetites and expenses.** The more one has, the more one wants, like me with cheese curds. We see this in verse 11: “*When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?*” When you have more, you need more people to help you manage what you have. In Solomon’s context, it took a lot of people to keep farming operations going.

In addition, when you have a lot, you tend to attract others who want what you have as we see in Proverbs 19:4: “*Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man is deserted by his friend.*” With the accumulation of so many things, the owner simply stands and admires what he has, or as one translation puts it, “*he feasts his eyes on them.*” According to Solomon, once you buy something, you get to take what you purchased...and look at it!

- **Riches cause insomnia.** People will spend a lot of money to get a good night’s sleep. If you don’t believe me, just walk into a mattress store. Look at verse 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.*” The word “*sweet*” means, “*pleasant*” and was often used to describe honey. The word “*much*” has the idea of “*overabundance.*” The hard-working laborer can fall asleep quickly but the one who gorges on gourmet food ends up with some gastrointestinal issues, their insomnia caused by indigestion.

With an increase in wealth comes increased worry. We saw this in 2:23: ***“...even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.”*** The more you have, the more you worry about what you have and the more you want to protect what you have. If you have a hard time sleeping, like I do, consider Psalm 127:2: ***“It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for He gives to His beloved sleep.”*** Derek Kidner writes, *“If anything is worse than the addiction money brings, it is the emptiness it leaves.”*

- **Materialism will mess you up.** While it’s common to hear that money is the key to happiness, verse 13 gives a different take: ***“There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt.”*** The word **“grievous”** means, *“sickening.”* It makes Solomon ill to think about this. The word **“kept”** refers to hoarding to such an extreme that one keeps, watches, and preserves his wealth by hiding it somewhere and nailing it shut for protection. Friends, hoarding wealth will ultimately harm us. James 5:1 says, ***“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you.”***

Materialism can become a malignancy in your soul and cause you to bail on your faith. 1 Timothy 6:10 says, ***“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.”***

This week I read an article entitled, *“5 Reasons Why Winning the Lottery Can Destroy Lives.”* The first reason is because everyone will ask you for money. One winner writes: *“I had to endure the greed people have, trying to get you to release your money to them...they’ve turned into vampires, trying to suck the life out of me.”*

According to the National Endowment for Financial Education, 70% of lottery winners go bankrupt within just a few years. The article concludes, *“The desire to indulge in pleasures often fills the void left by pursuing achievements...obtaining more money often leads to careless spending and the desire to get more money...the greed can be destructive to the lives of winners and their families.”*

In another article entitled *“20 Lottery Winners Who Lost it All,”* William “Bud” Post won \$16.2 million in the Pennsylvania lottery in 1988, but was \$1 million in debt within a year. *“I wish it never happened,”* Post said. *“It*

was totally a nightmare.” A former girlfriend successfully sued him for a third of his winnings, and his brother was arrested for allegedly hiring a hit man to kill him in the hopes he’d inherit a share of the winnings. After sinking money into family businesses, Post sank into debt and spent time in jail for firing a gun over the head of a bill collector. “I was much happier when I was broke,” he said. Bud lived quietly on \$450 a month and food stamps until his death in 2006.

- **Money can disappear quickly.** Whether from a bad investment, a catastrophe, or the stock market crashing, verse 14 says, ***“And those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is a father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.”*** Instead of having an inheritance to leave to his children, this person had seen it all fly away like we see in Proverbs 23:5: ***“When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven.”***

It's such a privilege to have Dr. Christopher Yuan speaking at our Holy Sexuality Conference on Saturday, October 5th. He'll also be preaching in all three services that weekend. When he was practicing homosexuality and selling drugs, he learned how money can suddenly sprout wings and fly away. He writes about this in his book called, “Out of a Far Country,” which we have copies of at the Edge Café. Here's an excerpt: *“Most nights my pockets were so stuffed with cash that I had to go out to my car just to empty them out. I was on top of the world – rich, popular, and powerful. It was more than anyone could dream of. This must be what it's like to be God.”*

Shortly after this, he was arrested and sent to prison. In prison, he found a Bible in the trash and started reading it, leading him to salvation. The book is very engaging as Christopher and his mom take turns writing each chapter. It's literally one of the best books I've ever read. BTW, his mom is also coming to the conference and will be leading a breakout session for parents and grandparents. Also, if you've not listened to Pastor Kyle's 4G podcast interview with Dr. Yuan, I encourage you to do so.

- **You can't take it with you.** We see this in verse 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.*** This seems to come right from Job's testimony when he lost everything in Job 1:21: ***“Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The***

Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Paul said something similar in 1 Timothy 6:7: ***“For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.”*** We’ll lose our money one way or another, and most certainly will lose it at death.

In verse 16, Solomon concludes, ***“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?”*** The phrase “grievous evil” can be translated as, “severe calamity or depressing misfortune.” Seeking satisfaction by pursuing possessions is evasive, like laboring for the wind. Hosea 8:7 says, ***“For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.”***

When a wealthy man died, this question was asked at his funeral, *“How much did he leave?”* One of his friends replied, *“He left all of it.”*

- **It’s miserable to be a miser.** Check out verse 17: ***“Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.”*** This is where greed will lead. You will end up being alone, anxious, afflicted, and angry. In the Bible, eating was normally a social occasion, so a man eating in isolation would be considered something abnormal. The word ***“darkness”*** refers to *“having a sad face.”*

This makes me think of Scrooge, who kept the fires in his fireplace low to save money. He had no friends and was planning to spend Christmas Eve alone in a cold, dark room. Psalm 102:9 says, ***“For I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink.”*** Here’s a question to ponder: *Have you ever heard of a happy miser?*

Generosity, on the other hand, brings great joy. I’m thrilled to report that Edgewood gave over \$14,000 to Pregnancy Resources through the Baby Bottle Project this year, which is double what is usually given! Edgewood member Cory McAnally, who has Down Syndrome, raised nearly \$4,000 for the Walk for Life this year. Over the last six years, he has raised over \$19,000! A couple years ago, Cory wrote why he does this. Here’s a translation: *“Cory McAnally wants to give Pregnancy Resources and Jesus money in the thousands. We’re saving the lives of babies. Way to go, Cory!”*

I witnessed joyful generosity this week when an individual stopped by the office to drop off his tithing envelope. He does this twice a month and every time he does so with great joy as he reverently offers it to the Lord. Thanks to those who give on a regular basis as we are now experiencing a surplus, which will help us address some needs we're experiencing and some new ministry initiatives. Speaking of needs, our parking lot has been full the last several weeks during the 9:00 hour. If you're able to carpool with someone, park on the grass by the volleyball court, or even attend on Saturday or at 10:45, that would help alleviate the congestion until we can come up with a more permanent solution.

If we can't put our hope in political solutions, or put our trust in the pursuit of personal possessions, what can we count on today? I picture Solomon writing these next words with a big smile on his face.

The love of money will not provide meaning in life.

3. A preoccupation with joy brings contentment. We see this in verses 18-20: ***“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.”***

The word **“behold”** is vivid and communicates hope and surprise. It literally means, *“Look, now!”* It's as if he's saying, *“Let's view this another way.”* Since political solutions are often corrupt and the pursuit of money is corrosive, we can be left feeling sad, bad, and mad. But we don't have to stay there – we can also be glad as we accept our lot in life and rejoice in the gifts God has given us.

Up until this point in the chapter, politics and money have taken center stage. Now, Solomon reintroduces God into the equation. Without God, everything is meaningless and miserable. Let's make some observations.

- God's name is used four times in these three verses.
- God is referred to as a giver. In verses 18-19 we read: ***“God has given”*** twice and in verse 19 we see the phrase, ***“gift of God.”***
- Words like enjoyment, enjoy, rejoice and joy are used four times. Not coincidentally, when God shows up, so does joy.

Write this down. When God is front and center in our lives, He will give joy and contentment to us so we can be satisfied with what we have. Here's a news flash. Everything you have, and every person in your life, will let you down unless you fix your eyes on the Giver. Those who chase money will never catch it, but those who are content with their cash will find joy. God wants us to find enjoyment in Him as we saw in 3:13: ***“Everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil – this is God’s gift to man.”***

Properly understood, everything we have is a gift from God, including that breath you just took. In addition, since joy and contentment are gifts from God, we can rejoice in the everyday things of life. Unfortunately, we're a lot like Israel in the wilderness. Even though God promised to provide daily manna from Heaven, and we pray, ***“Give us our daily bread,”*** we're prone to hoard what we've been given because we secretly wonder if God the giver will continue to give good gifts to us.

We must come to God with open hands, admitting our anxieties and confessing our idolatries, as daily affirming our dependence on Him. Look to God and find joy and satisfaction in life, even in the midst of injustice or whether you have a lot of money or little money. We're called to enjoy everything as a gift from God and hold it open handed for whenever He sees fit to take it from us. To quote the British philosopher Mick Jagger, *“You can't always get what you want. But if you try, sometimes you just might find you get what you need.”*

Verse 20 may be my favorite verse so far in our study: ***“For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.”*** When I'm occupied with joy, I don't have anxiety about other things in my life and my struggles are all but forgotten. On the other hand, when I'm preoccupied with my problems, my joy is jettisoned. Someone said it like this, *“Even though we live in dark and evil days, our days can be enjoyable. When God grants joy and happiness to a man, man can forget about the brevity of his life.”*

Psalm 4:7 says, ***“You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound.”*** Psalm 16:11 says, ***“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”***

This might surprise you, but when God is at the center of my life, He gives me more joy than even cheese curds can!

The love of money will not provide meaning in life.

Action Steps

1. Transfer everything you own to God. Everything we have belongs to God and is on loan to us. We are simply managers of what He has entrusted to us. Psalm 24:1: ***“The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein.”*** Have you ever transferred ownership to Him?

2. Learn the secret of contentment. You can have everything you think you want and if you don’t have Jesus, you have nothing. If you have Jesus, you have everything you need. Unless Jesus is enough, you’ll never have enough. Contentment is not having everything you want; it’s wanting everything you already have. Contentment comes only from Christ and does not depend on a possession, the pursuit of pleasure, or a person. Put this equation in your soul: Jesus + Nothing = Everything. Philippians 4:11-13: ***“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”***

3. Pray the Lord’s prayer every day. I appreciated Pastor Kyle’s message last weekend on the Lord’s Prayer when he said we pray because sometimes God has something better for us that we can’t see at first. Here’s another prayer you could pray: *“Heavenly Father, you are in charge of everything that is going to happen to me today, whether it is good or bad. Please make me to be occupied with joy so I can live on mission for you.”*

4. Give what God has given to you. Are you leveraging your time, your talents, and your treasures for kingdom purposes? You can worship your money as a god, or you can worship God *with* your money. In Matthew 6:24, Jesus said, ***“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 money.”***

I’ll never forget what happened several years ago when a new couple came to our Saturday night service and sat right down front. I love it when guests come but I was nervous because I was preaching about tithing that weekend. After the service the wife wanted to talk. I thought she was going to tell me that preachers are always asking for money and that she’s never coming back. As we sat in the back

pew, she started weeping and said, “*When you were talking about giving 10% to the Lord, I realized I’ve not even given 1% of my life to Him. I want to be saved right now so I can give 100% of my life to Him.*” She prayed to receive Christ that very night!

5. Surrender to Jesus and experience satisfaction in your soul. Most of us try to pour activities or experiences into our lives hoping they will satisfy our thirsty souls, not realizing that whatever we put in just runs out the bottom. Friend, no substance will satisfy your thirst. That’s why the buzz always wears off and you need another hit or another six-pack. Whatever you put in will run out. Only a relationship with Jesus Christ can fill you up! Everything else will leak and leave you feeling empty.

Kevin DeYoung is spot on: “*The only thing worse than having none of our dreams come true is having all of them come true and still being unhappy.*” The offer of Jesus as recorded in Revelation 22:17 still stands: “*And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.*” Forgiveness is free...but you have to take it. You won’t be satisfied until the Savior washes your sins away.

In Matthew 12:42, Jesus said this about Himself: “*Behold, something greater than Solomon is here.*” In Luke 12:15, He said, “*Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.*” In Luke 12:19-21, He described a man who was living for money: “*And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.*”

It’s time to repent and receive Christ right now...before it’s too late.

Invitation Prayer

New Members @ 10:45

- Suzanne Anderson
- Mark Murdock and Reem Alrasheed