

## **Teach Us, Qohelet (Part 9)**

Ecclesiastes 5:8-20

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*Qohelet*, our teacher and gatherer, imparts his wisdom to us so that we may not repeat his mistakes. He had wealth, power, wisdom, and fame. He lived a full life and pursued everything under the sun, yet he failed to find satisfaction. In Ecclesiastes 5, *Qohelet* tells us that the pursuit of wealth does not fulfill. We all know this, but he goes even further to say that pursuing wealth changes us. We would be naïve to think that we wouldn't change if we won the lottery. If you were rich, would you stay at an unsatisfying job? Would your spending habits stay the same? Though we are already broken and sinful, the pursuit of money still can change us for the worse.

In vv. 8-9 *Qohelet* talks more about oppression, which was first discussed in chapter 4. But this time he tells us that the ultimate source of oppression is the lust for wealth. These verses describe a pyramid scheme we see all too often in the world and in our workplaces. The man at the top wants more, so he presses down on the directors, who press down on the managers, who press down on the supervisors, who press down on the employees. Those at the bottom suffer so that the one at the top can gain more wealth. This corrupt system is driven by greed.

But don't think that if you are at the bottom, you are free from the love of money and its corrupting influence. In a general sense, the more you want money, the more immoral things you will be willing to do to gain money. Everyone has a price at which they will be tempted to sacrifice their integrity and do something dishonest. Even things like failing to report income in your taxes or pirating software show us how money has the ability to make us do the wrong thing.

Money can make us do that which makes us feel guilty, yet it doesn't really satisfy us in the end. In v. 10 *Qohelet* tells us that the more money we have, the more we want. It never feels like enough because as our wealth increases, so does our appetite and our tastes. Money changes our lifestyle and our spending. If we had millions of dollars and maintained our current lifestyles, it would seem like a lot of money. But if we bought a mansion and private jet, and spent lavishly on expensive things, suddenly those millions seem like they are not enough.

*Qohelet* also tells us in v. 12 that more money brings restlessness and worry. In the film *Forrest Gump*, after Forrest gets rich from his shrimp company, his response to being extremely

wealthy and never having to worry about money was, “Good, one less thing.” If only we responded with the same contentment... For most of us, the more money we have the more we have to worry about. As our wealth grows, our expenses grow. The more we have, the more we invest, and the more we have to lose. The larger our 401k’s get, the more we worry about them. So many parents today push their children to be successful and earn a lot of money, but we must realize that this will not make their lives more fulfilled, but instead will make them restless and filled with worry.

From vv. 13-17, *Qohelet* tells us that much wealth also leads to frustration, affliction, and anger, in a general sense. Those who love money get angry that they don’t have enough, and that others have more than they do. When people have wealth, they tend to hoard it, and the attachment to wealth makes its loss feel even more calamitous. They are frustrated to know that they can’t take anything with them when they die, and that their children will squabble over their inheritance. The love of money brings out the worst in people, and leads only to frustration, not fulfillment.

So in vv. 18-20 we see once again that the proper thing to do is to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in our toil. In other words, we should be content with what we have now. Don’t think that only when you have achieved or attained this or that that you will be fulfilled. Wanting more doesn’t lead to fulfillment, because when we get what we want, we only want more once again. And we will come up empty every time. So how do we find contentment? Paul says in Philippians 4:12-13 that the secret to contentment is to direct our attention to heavenly things. This is also what *Qohelet* has been saying. So let us listen to him, and pray that we have contentment in our lives today through Jesus Christ who strengthens us.