

“Overcoming Greed”

Ecclesiastes 5:10 *“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”*

Do you realize that Jesus spoke more about money than any other topic? More often than prayer, more often than witnessing, more often than faith, Jesus spoke clearly and specifically about money. As a matter of fact, the entire Bible is filled with stories and teachings on the topic of money.

Money is one of the most powerful weapons Satan uses to separate us from our heavenly Father. Throughout history and to this day, uses money to destroy homes, businesses, countries, and the personal lives of many people.

We need to evaluate our attitudes about money, because money is an excellent place to start in taking a look at ourselves as generous stewards who are empowered by God to give. How we handle our money is one of the best indicators of how responsibly we’re managing the resources God has given us.

Jesus said, *“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”* (Matthew 6:21). Talk is cheap. Anyone can talk about what it takes to live the Christian life. Anyone can talk about how great God is, but the true test of stewardship is whether or not we’re bearing fruit (John 15:16). Jesus told us that his followers will be recognized by their fruit. One of the clearest insights we can gain into ourselves is what we do with the money God gives us to manage.

King Solomon was a very wealthy man, perhaps the richest, certainly the wisest, king in the history of Israel He lived about 2800 years ago, and what he taught in this book still applies. In verse 10, Solomon addressed the sin of greed. Greed: the desire for more and more of something, especially money, the opposite of the desire to give. Solomon wrote the words I shared earlier, *“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth, with his income; this also is vanity.”* Jesus also warned us of the all-consuming nature of greed. 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”* (Luke 12:15). Isn’t it interesting that two notable figures in history, one among the wealthiest, the other – Jesus

-- among the poorest, warned us about the negative effects greed can have in our lives!

Let’s examine some of the symptoms. How can you know if you’ve been bitten by the bug of greed?

Solomon began by saying, *“Whoever loves money never has money enough.”* Here is the first symptom then: a love of money. The Apostle Paul seemed to agree for he wrote, *“The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil”* (1 Timothy 6:10). Does it mean that it is wrong to enjoy or desire money? Should we hate money? Then we’re all in trouble, because we all like money! Right? Does it mean that if rich Aunt Martha leaves all her money to us, we should refuse to accept it, saying, “No way! Not money! I hate money!”

What’s so BAD about loving money? When the Bible talks about loving money, it’s not talking about enjoying the use of money; it’s talking about liking it so much that we develop a “love relationship” with it. Then we’re in trouble.

We know that, in years gone by and still in some places today, people actually worship idols made of wood or gold or metal. The Bible very explicitly condemns that practice. *“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image...”* we read in Exodus 20:3, 4. We are to worship only the one true living God who has revealed himself in three persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Though most of us do not bow down before carved idols, we do, at times, make idols of our money or our possessions or whatever our money can buy. Greed can produce those idols. When we get depressed, we turn to them for comfort. When we’re happy, we give them the credit. Before we know it, we not only worship them, we become their slaves. Money is a great servant but a terrible master.

Who is it or what is it that is your master in life? Isn’t it the thing or person that you love the most? God calls himself a “jealous God” (Exodus 20:5). He tells us to love him with all our heart and soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:5). When we love money in the way Solomon described, it displaces God as first in our lives and becomes our god.

In addition to citing a love of money as a symptom of greed, Solomon wrote, *“He who loves money will not be satisfied with...his income.”* This obsessive desire, the desire that can never be satisfied, is the

second symptom of greed. Greed is not limited to the wealthy; you can be dirt-poor and be greedy as well. Some people think they don't have to worry about greed because they have little or nothing. This is really false confidence, because greed is not a matter of what you do or don't have, but a matter of how much you WANT. Even John D. Rockefeller, one of the richest people in the world during his time, when asked how much money was enough, answered, "Just a little more." Most of us think that way. "If our house had just one more bedroom. If I could just get that raise I've asked for. Then our problems would be solved; we'd have no more stress." The root cause of that type of thinking is: greed.

Many people use this line of reasoning when confronted with giving. "We would love to give more, but we just don't earn enough. When I get that raise, we're going to start tithing. When we get our bills paid off, we'll have something left for the offering plate." Just a little more, we say, but Solomon warns that we'll never be satisfied.

Solomon called it "*meaningless*," in other words, emptiness. If you are experiencing emptiness already – if your money is actually bringing disappointment instead of fulfillment, you are experiencing that third symptom of greed: meaninglessness. Throughout this wisdom book, Solomon discussed ways of filling the void in our lives. In this section, he talks about money. You may hear some say, "Well, I know people say money isn't everything, but I'd like to find that out for myself!" Take it from a man who had it all and concluded that money definitely isn't everything. It cannot fill that void. It leaves us still feeling empty.

Now, if you are experiencing any of these symptoms of greed – if you have an unhealthy attachment to money, if you are never satisfied with what you have, if you find yourself feeling empty – you must be asking, "What's the cure?"

Solomon's recommendation to us is that we learn to enjoy our work and all the gifts God has given us. Then God will enable us to accept where we are. God will bring us contentment. Paul wrote to Timothy, "*Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment*" (1 Timothy 6:6). Knowing that God will provide all we need and being content with what God sees fit to provide is great gain. Solomon called it "accepting our lot." Jesus told us not to

worry about what we will eat or drink or wear, because our heavenly Father knows what we need (Matthew 6:25-26). In fact, Paul admonishes and encourages us by writing, "*As for the rich, in this present age, 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.*"

Are we in there? Are we rich? People in Latvia think we are, and they pray for us because they understand that riches are a serious temptation that should not overcome us.

God's greatest gift to us is the gift of his Son who has accomplished for us our salvation. We need nothing else, but God desires to provide for us richly, as we just read, with "*everything to enjoy*" besides! "*He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*" God promises that through Paul.

We realize that we are sinful beings completely undeserving of that grace; we realize that God owes us nothing. We realize that everything we are and have comes from God's gracious hand.

How grateful are we to our gracious God? How grateful are we for the gift of his Son? How grateful for his Spirit, who works in us through Word and Sacrament, to bring us to faith, to convict us of sin, to draw us to himself? In addition to our verbal expressions of thanks, how do we show our gratitude but by joyfully giving back what we have received?

The more we truly believe that all we have are gifts from God, the more thankful we will be. Our thoughts will be concentrated on what we have received instead of what we thought we needed or wanted. Instead of thinking of giving as a duty or an obligation, we will see it, as a privilege. With "gladness of heart," we will grow in the grace of giving.

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