

Text: Ecclesiastes 5:10 - 20 (NIV)

¹⁰ Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless. ¹¹ As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them? ¹² The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep. ¹³ I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner, ¹⁴ or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind? ¹⁷ All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

Theme: Finding Joy in our Wealth

We might think that we have little compared with other people. Sometimes we even envy those who are rich, but to be honest, we all have a lot compared to many people in this world. A couple of weeks ago I spoke with Pastor Gui about differences between the US and the Congo. In the Congo an apartment would be a luxury. The homes of people in the refugee camps are a roof, with sticks and branches which the family gathered as the walls around the home. I noticed that one of the families didn't understand our washing machines very well. I asked if they are different in the Congo. His response was "Machines?! No one has a washing machine."

We have homes with a constant supply of power and water. Many of us have multiple televisions and several smart phones in our families. Many of us have investments and retirement accounts. We have multiple cars and closets full of clothes. Very few of us are malnourished.

We have so many material possessions. They can be either a blessing or a curse. Today I would like to look at how we can find joy in our worldly possessions.

I. Wealth is something that we do not love as Christians for several reasons.

We will never have enough. It says in verse 10, "*He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this is also vanity.*" When we love our money and wealth, we will never be satisfied with what we have. We always have a desire for more. We never seem to have enough. If we make \$30,000 a year, we would love to have \$40,000. If we have a 40 inch tv, we long for a 55 inch. If we can afford first class airline tickets, we would long for our own private jet. Worldly wealth is something that never satisfies when our hearts are set on it. We always want more.

When worldly wealth increases, so do the people who want a slice of our pie. It says in verse 11, "*When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?*" This plays out in all sorts of ways. Did you ever work overtime or get that raise

at work only to have the government take more in taxes? If you receive a large sum of money, suddenly there are friends and relatives that keep coming and asking for help. You get a target on your back. A number of years ago, I read a story in the *Detroit News*, which looked back at the first ten years of the Michigan lottery. The 10 biggest winners were interviewed. Every one of them said that it ruined their life. One of the reasons was that suddenly everyone was coming out of the woodwork asking for money. As Christians we want to be generous with what God gives to us, but that generosity is often taken advantage of, and when our hearts are set on our riches, any generosity is a burden.

They can be lost. It says in verse 14, *“Those riches were lost in a bad venture.”* How many of us lost money when the stock market went down a few years ago? You might still be waiting for some of your investments to get back to what they once were. How many of our homes are worth what they were a few years ago? Did you ever buy a car, which looked so beautiful on the lot? Before you finished paying for it, it became a rust bucket. There are often things that we buy which we regret. The buyer’s remorse sets in pretty quickly. If our hearts are set on our riches, we will be devastated when they go down, wear out or are stolen.

Eventually we will die and leave them to someone else. It says 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.”* When we die, we can’t take one penny with us. It all goes to someone else. There are even a lot of jokes about this. It is said that you never see a moving truck behind a hearse. My favorite is the man who wanted to be buried with all his money, so his family wrote him a check and placed it in the casket. When we leave this world, we all leave with none of our earthly treasures. When our last hour comes, will our thoughts be on what we leave behind or will they be on the riches we will soon receive through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ?

Finally, if our hearts are set on the things of this world, we will find no joy in acquiring them. It says in verse 17, *“Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.”* When we live to serve our wealth, work becomes a burden. It becomes the means to get what we want. We hate our job, every minute of it. We begin to look at work as a necessary evil. We have so much stress acquiring the things that we want, that we are never able to enjoy them.

II. The Christian attitude, however, is to see our work and the wealth that comes from it as gifts from God.

Christians are encouraged to enjoy our work. It says in verse 18, *“What I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which God has given him, for this is his lot.”* Work is not a necessary evil. When God created Adam, He gave Him work to do in the garden. The Bible is also clear that those who don’t desire to work should not eat. It was only after the fall into sin, that toil became associated with work, but in the beginning work was also a good thing.

It is a blessing when we can find enjoyment in our work. We see our work as a part of our calling from God. It is a way that we can serve both God and our neighbor. We might not go to work every morning singing, “Hi, ho!” But it is a blessing when we can say that we have served our customers and our fellow workers. We have accomplished some good through our work this day. Enjoyment

of our work is a great blessing from God.

We are also encouraged to be thankful for all the blessings that God gives to us through our work. It says in verse 19, *“Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possession and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil, this is a gift from God.”* God’s greatest gift to us is our salvation through Jesus Christ. Earlier we looked at what happens when people love their money and wealth. We all have to confess that there have been times in each of our lives when we have done that. Like the disciples we need to ask, *“Who then can be saved?”* (Mk 10:26) Thanks be to God, Christ has taken this sin also on Himself. There was no greed in Him, but He paid for our greed on the cross. We confess our sin, and thanks be to God, He forgives this sin also.

But we are also thankful for all of God blessings on this earth. He has given each of us abilities. He has given us brains. He has blessed us in so many ways. When He blesses us abundantly in this world, Moses’ words in Deuteronomy 8 also apply to us, *“When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you...Remember the LORD you God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.”* (Dt 8:10,18) We find joy, even in the things of this world, when we simply recognize them as blessings from God, and we are thankful for them.

A couple of weeks ago I spoke with a man from Minnesota who often listens to my German radio program. He lost everything during the Second World War, including his father and his freedom as a POW for several years. He came to this country with nothing. He told me that God blessed him in this country more than he could have ever imagined.

That is the Christian attitude toward wealth and money. We don’t love them or trust in them because when we do, they will eventually disappoint us and fill us with all kinds of griefs. The Christian attitude is to find joy in the work that God has blessed us with, and to be thankful for all the blessings that God has given to us both spiritually and in this world.

May God bless us with that joyful work and give us thankful hearts for all His blessings to us in Christ.

Amen.

***Pastor Don Hougard
Benediction Lutheran Church
Milwaukee, WI
October 21, 2012***