

Riches I Heed Not

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in Ecclesiastes chapter 5.

Ecclesiastes chapter 5, I'd like us to look at the whole passage, but if we take as our text the words of verse 10. Ecclesiastes 5 at verse 10, where Solomon says, he who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income.

This also is vanity. Now, when I consider what Solomon is saying to us here in his sermon about the love of money and the vanity of loving money, you know, it reminds me of the words of the well-known hymn, Be Thou My Vision.

But what I didn't realize about the hymn, Be Thou My Vision, I didn't realize it was an Irish hymn, and it was written by a woman in the 8th century called Mary Byron.

And because it was an Irish hymn, the hymn was originally written in Irish Gaelic. But it wasn't until 1912 that a woman called Eleanor Hull, she translated the hymn, the Irish hymn, from Irish Gaelic into English.

[1 : 27] And as you can expect, when it was translated into English, its popularity increased because more people could read it and its fame spread throughout the world. You know, when we read these beautiful words that are written in your intimations, we can see that these words, they very clearly remind us that the hymn writer, Mary Byron, she lived life with an eternal perspective.

She lived her life looking to the Lord, and she lived her life in dependence upon the Lord. She longed for the Lord to be for her, or to be to her, what she could never be for herself.

And this is why she says, But you know, it's the next verse that reminds me of what Solomon is saying to us here about the love of money.

Because when Mary Byron sought to live her life with an eternal perspective by looking to the Lord and living in dependence upon the Lord, she not only saw how wonderful it is to have the Lord as her vision and her wisdom, her father, her dwelling place, her shield, her dignity, and her shelter. But when Mary Byron considered what the Lord was for her in comparison to what the world offered her, she knew that the offer of the world, it paled into insignificance.

[3 : 23] And that's why she went on to say, Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise. Thou mine inheritance, now and always.

Thou and thou only, first in my heart. High King of heaven, my treasure thou art. My friend, that's the testimony of someone who is living their life with an eternal perspective.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise. Thou mine inheritance, now and always. And as I've said, as we said before, that's what Solomon's sermon is all about.

Because the book of Ecclesiastes, it's a sermon. And Solomon, he's preaching about the need to live your life with an eternal perspective. He's preaching about the need to realize that eternity is not that far away.

Because our time is short, our days are numbered, our years are like a tale that is told. Our life is just a vapor. And eternity is looming.

[4 : 28] And he's saying that you need to live your life in light of eternity. But Solomon is saying this to us, not to steal our joy. Not to take away our fun and our enjoyment of life.

Solomon says to us that life and all its blessings, they are to be enjoyed. We're to enjoy everything that the Lord gives to us. But Solomon says we're to enjoy it from the right perspective.

And Solomon is speaking, as we've said, he's speaking from his own experience. Because he came to discover for himself that you can work hard. You can have many possessions. You can possess great knowledge.

You can even be the wisest person that ever lived. But if you're not living your life with an eternal perspective, then you're living your life as a fool. And Solomon says this because he himself was drawn in by the vanity of the world.

And he swallowed the lie that this world can give to us all the pleasures that our heart desires. And Solomon, he now humbly admits that even though it may have seemed good at the time, it was all vanity.

[5 : 37] Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities. It was all striving after the wind. All meaningless. But Solomon's hope as he preaches this sermon to us is that we will spare ourselves the bitterness of learning what he learned.

And respond in faith by committing ourselves to Jesus Christ. Now what we see in this passage, in order to press upon us the need to live our lives with an eternal perspective.

Solomon wants us to see the vanity of riches. Solomon wants us to have the testimony of Mary Byron. Riches I heed not. Nor man's empty praise.

Thou mine inheritance now and always. But in order for us to be convinced that the desire for wealth is vanity. It's vain. Solomon presents to us three things.

He highlights three things for us in this passage. And he highlights the restlessness of riches. Then he highlights the ruin of riches. And then he gives to us near the end of the chapter.

[6 : 43] The remedy of riches. So the restlessness of riches. The ruin of riches. And the remedy of riches. So we look first of all at the restlessness of riches.

The restlessness of riches. Look at verse 8. Solomon says, 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. But this is gain. This is gain for a land in every way. A king committed to cultivated fields.

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money. Nor he who loves wealth with his income.

This also is vanity. And in these verses, Solomon, he reminds us about the restless nature of our sinful heart.

And Solomon, he brings this to our attention by showing us the way in which the world works.

Because Solomon says that in the world, there is the oppression of the poor.

[7 : 44] And there is violence towards those who are vulnerable. And there is the perversion of justice. Solomon says, consider the world you live in. And all you will see is injustice, unrighteousness, and wickedness.

And as Solomon says throughout his sermon, there is nothing new under the sun. Nothing new at all. And it's because there is nothing new under the sun that Solomon says, don't be amazed at the matter.

Don't marvel at the matter. Don't be amazed that money is more important than people. And don't marvel at the fact that money or power is more important than people.

Because there is nothing new under the sun. That's the way it has always been. That's the way it has been since the beginning. And you know, Solomon is right.

Because when we consider what happened in the Garden of Eden when sin came into the world. Sin came into the world because of Adam's desire to be like God.

[8 : 46] Adam wanted to have his eyes opened. And he wanted to have the power to know good and evil just like God. And what's remarkable is that Adam's desire to be like God, it was more important to him than being content with what God had given to him.

Adam wasn't satisfied. And he had this restless desire to have more knowledge, to have more power. And he sought to do everything he could to receive it. And when he got it, he was found out. He got caught. And when he got caught, Adam discovered his sin. He discovered his nakedness before God. But you know, the sad reality about the fall is that Adam didn't think twice about putting the blame on his wife.

And that's because what Adam wanted, it was more important to him than the wife that God had given him. And you know, that's what Solomon is talking about here when he says, Don't be amazed that money is more important than people.

Don't marvel at the fact that power is more important than people. That's the way it comes across because high official is watched by a higher official. And a higher official watches over them.

[10 : 02] And what Solomon is saying is that there is this great hierarchy in life. With one person ruling over the other. And if they step out of line, the one who's higher up, well, he will bring

oppression, maybe violence, maybe even a perversion of the truth to get them into trouble.

And you know, we see it all the time with the government. We see it all the time in the workplace. Because of the sin in our own hearts, everyone is ready and willing to blame someone else. We're ready to just drop them in it. If need be, just to make ourselves look better. Just to make ourselves, we're ready to tear one another down. Maybe not to their face, but behind their back. In order to make ourselves look good. And yet we forget that God has made us all equal. And he's made us in his image and in his likeness.

And he's given everything to us. And Solomon is saying we are to be content with our lot. But the truth is there is this restless desire in our sinful hearts.

[11:11] To be the best. To be loved. To be accepted. To be honoured. To be favoured above other people. And that desire, it's sometimes more important than other people.

And Solomon says that we shouldn't be amazed that the desire for acceptance is more important than other people. And we should marvel that money is sometimes more important to us than people. Because that's the reality of our sinful heart.

Our sinful heart is self-centred. My friend, our sinful heart is self-centred. And if you can't see that your sinful heart is self-centred.

Then you're deceiving yourself. But you know Solomon, he not only speaks about our restless desire for recognition. He also speaks about our restless desire for riches.

He says in verse 10, He who loves money will not be satisfied with money. Not he who loves wealth with his income. This also is vanity. And you know when we read those words of verse 10.

[12:21] Are we not immediately reminded of the familiar words of Paul. Where he said the love of money is the root of all evil. Paul never said money is the root of all evil.

Solomon doesn't say that money is the root of all evil. No, both Paul and Solomon, they're very clear. They say the love of money is the root of all evil. Because when it comes to money, no one ever says that they have a problem spending money.

Money is not a problem in the parish. It's a good thing to have money in your parish. Money is not a problem in the bank. It's a good thing to have money in the bank. But my friend, money is only a problem in the heart.

Because it's not money that's the root of all evil. It's the love of money. It's not wealth that's the problem. It's the love of wealth. It's not possessions that's the problem. It's the love of possessions. It's the love of more and more and more. And the covetous desire to have it all. And this is what Solomon means by the restlessness of riches.

[13:25] Because he says, he who loves money will not be satisfied with money. The person who loves money and wealth and possessions, they'll never be satisfied with what they have.

They'll always want more. And when they get more, says Solomon, when their goods increase, that's what he says in verse 11, what do they really have? What benefit is it actually to them? What advantage do they now have, having that thing they always wanted? And he says, nothing. They just have more to look at. That's all it is. More to look at.

And Solomon then goes on to say in verse 12, that the person who loves money and wealth and possessions, they will be so restless that it will even keep them awake at night.

Their desire for the next thing, the next project, the next purchase, the next, it will consume their mind. And they'll think about it all the time. They'll talk about it all the time.

[14:26] It might even keep them awake at night. But Solomon is saying to us, what about eternity? What about eternity? Where does God fit into all that?

Where does eternity come into it all? My friend, what Solomon is saying to us is, if you love money, or wealth, or possessions, when your goods increase, you are no closer to heaven than when you were born.

In fact, when you read what the prophet Habakkuk says about money, he says, he that loves silver and sets his heart upon it will never think he has enough, but enlarges his desires as hell.

And you know, it's a solemn reminder that the love of money is a desire that comes from hell.

Because when we consider Judas Iscariot, we see that he was a man, he heard Jesus preach, he saw Jesus perform miracles, he sat and ate with Jesus, but it's evident that Judas' love of money, it came from hell.

Because as we know, Judas, he handed Jesus over, he handed the Son of God over to be crucified for, what, 30 pieces of silver. Judas loved money more than Jesus.

[15:56] And Judas' money was more important to him than following Jesus. And that's because he loved money, and his love of money, it came from the pit of hell.

You know, we have to be careful. Whether we are converted or unconverted, we have to be careful that we don't love money more than Jesus.

We have to be careful that we don't love our possessions, or our position, or our family, more than Jesus. Jesus must be first.

We can't put anything before him. Seek first the kingdom of God, said Jesus. Then all the other things shall be added unto you. And so Solomon is calling us to live our lives with an eternal perspective by considering the vanity of wealth, and the vanity of honor.

And Solomon, he's spoken about the restlessness of riches, but then he speaks, secondly, about the ruin of riches. The ruin of riches. If you look at verse 13, he says, There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun.

[17:13] Riches were kept by their owner to his heart, and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. 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 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? Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness, in much vexation and sickness and anger. Now, we mentioned earlier the familiar phrase of the Apostle Paul, the love of money is the root of all evil. But the reason Paul said those words was because he was stressing to the young minister Timothy, he was stressing to him the need to be content.

Paul said to Timothy, godliness with contentment is great gain. And then Paul goes on to say, because we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world.

But if we have food and clothing with these things, we will be content. Then Paul says, those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

[18:31] For the love of money is the root of all evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith. But as for you, O man of God, Timothy, flee these things, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, and steadfastness.

Fight the good fight of faith, he says. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made a good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

And what Paul is saying, what he was saying was that we need to be content with our lot because through godliness, through Christian living, living your life with an eternal perspective, that's what will lead to contentment.

And godliness with contentment is great gain, he says. But you know, in these verses, Solomon presents the opposite. Solomon speaks about the ungodly desire for wealth and the great hurt that it causes.

He says in verse 13, there is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun. Riches were kept by their owner to his own heart. Now when Solomon considers the ruin of riches, he speaks about wealth that is loved and lost.

[19:51] Wealth that is loved and lost. And he says down in verse 14 that wealth can be loved and lost in a bad venture. Riches can be loved and lost because they perish through misfortune.

And when Solomon speaks like this, he's not talking about losing money by misplacing it. He's talking about losing money by gambling it. Because the words misfortune not bad venture, they literally mean to be stripped off in the sense of being robbed.

And that's the image Solomon is seeking to portray to us. This image of a thief running up behind us and he comes from behind without our knowledge of him coming and he takes from us.

He strips and snatches out of our hand what we have worked so hard to earn. And Solomon says that's what gambling does. It robs us and strips from us what we have worked so hard to earn.

And Solomon says to us that the only reason someone gambles for money is because they love money. They're not content. They love money and they want more money.

[21:01] They don't want to put in the effort to make money by working. And they're willing to gamble what they already have in order to fulfill this restless desire for more riches.

My friend, the only reason someone gambles for money is to make more money and make more money because they love money. And yet as Solomon says, it will only lead to ruin and to hurt.

And you know, the society we live in it often acts with such foolishness. Because when we consider the adverts that we watch on the television, a few years ago there were all these adverts promoting cigarettes, even though they came with a warning that smoking can kill you.

But then they thought, well, it was better to remove the adverts altogether and then cover them up in shops that no one will ever think about them. Then replacing the adverts of cigarettes was the adverts of cheap alcohol.

Every second advert was about cheap booze. But then the powers that be, they did a study and they said, well, we're now drinking too much so we have to remove these adverts. And so they removed, just like the cigarettes, they removed the adverts about alcohol.

[22 : 16] But no sooner had the adverts about alcohol and cigarettes gone when the adverts for gambling appeared. And there were all types, these, all these types of adverts for gambling, the lottery and online gambling and bingo and poker, it's all there.

You name it, our adverts were showing it and they were flaunting it and promoting it to us. And now after all that and with so many gambling addicts now in our country, the adverts, they're being removed.

Don't you think it's so foolish? The world offers all these things to us. It makes, it look to us so attractive, so appealing. But not one of these addictions satisfies the desires of our heart.

Not one of these things fulfills our longing for contentment. And all these loves, they're going, they're going to be lost.

Because they don't last. They never provide that lasting satisfaction that we're looking for. Because my friend, God has put eternity in our heart and until our heart is filled with the God of eternity, we will never be satisfied.

[23 : 35] Until you fall in love with Jesus, you will be lost. Until you fall in love with Jesus, you will be lost. And you know, I love what Solomon goes on to say in the second half of verse 14.

Because he says, he is a father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. And I love these words because they immediately remind me about the parable of the prodigal son.

He is a father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. And wasn't that the situation that the prodigal son found himself in? He asked for his father's inheritance, he gained it.

The prodigal son, he went off into the far country and he gambled all that he had. He squandered it on riotous living until he had nothing left. And the prodigal son, he loved money and he loved to have money, but his love of money was the cause of his loss of money.

He desired to gain the whole world, but in seeking to gain the whole world, he nearly lost his own soul. But it was only when the prodigal had lost everything that he came to the end of himself.

[24 : 48] It's only then that he realised that his love of the world, it hadn't given him the satisfaction that he longed for and desired. And when he came to the end of himself, the prodigal son, he decided that to return home to his father is far better.

And like Solomon says, the son returned to his father with nothing in his hands. He had nothing to claim. He had nothing to hold on to that was of any value. He had nothing to boast in.

All the prodigal could say was, all he could say to his father was, I have sinned against you. I have sinned against you. And you know, my unconverted friend, that's how you have to come to God.

You have to come like the prodigal with nothing in your hands, nothing to claim, nothing to cling to, nothing of any value that you can present to God, nothing to boast in.

You have to come like the prodigal and say, I have sinned against you. I have sinned against you.

And the beautiful thing about the parable of the prodigal son is that after the prodigal had squandered all his living, in riotous living, he had squandered the inheritance.

[26 : 09] But when he returned to his father, and when he asked his father for mercy, he received an even greater inheritance.

And that's the promise of the gospel, that when you come to God empty-handed, but full of confession and contrition, you will receive the promise of eternal life.

You will receive an inheritance, says Peter, that is incorruptible, undefiled, does not fade away, because it's all reserved in heaven for you.

It's all there waiting for you. But you know, Solomon, he doesn't leave it there, because when he considers the ruin of riches, he says that wealth, it can be loved and lost before we leave this world.

But then he says that wealth will certainly be loved and lost when we leave this world. Look at what he says in verse 15.

[27 : 16] 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 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? And in these verses, Solomon, he presents to us the reality of life and death. That naked we came into the world, naked we leave.

We come in with nothing, we leave with nothing. But you know, even though we know all that, and we're repeatedly confronted with it, again and again, when death comes into our homes, it comes into our families, it comes into our communities, even though we know it all, we see it all the time, yet we foolishly put it to the back of our minds, and we live our lives as if death is never going to happen to us.

We live our lives thinking, well, death is just far away, far away from us, it's a distant experience, and it's something that we won't see for a while, not now, not yet. But you know, that was the very reason Jesus told the parable of the rich fool.

complete contrast to the parable of the prodigal son. And Jesus said, beware of covetousness. Just before he told the parable, he said, beware of covetousness because your life does not consist in the abundance of your possessions.

[28 : 45] And with that warning, Jesus told the parable of the rich fool, but this man, as you know, he built bigger and better barns, he didn't have enough, but after he had stored his great harvest away, the rich fool said to himself, well soul, you have many goods and you've laid them up for many years.

Take it easy. Eat, drink, and be merry. Enjoy your life. But what did God say to him?

Thou fool. Thou fool. tonight thy soul shall be required of thee.

I fear for any of you, if you ever hear those words, thou fool, tonight thy soul shall be required of thee.

Because you know when Jesus told that parable, he asked the same question that Solomon is asking here. Whose will those things be which you have provided?

[29 : 59] Who will all your possessions belong to when you're gone? What gain is there, he says, for him who toils for the wind? And you know, it's a solemn question because it's a solemn reminder of what we came into the world with, nothing.

And what we leave with, nothing. as the old saying goes, shrouds have no pockets. They don't. And when we die, how much will we leave behind? Everything. Absolutely everything. That's the ruin of riches.

Its wealth is loved and lost. But of course, the reason Solomon is throwing our attention to all this, to the restlessness of riches and the ruin of riches, the reason he's doing this is because he wants us to see the remedy.

He wants us to see the remedy of riches. And that's what he brings us to lastly and briefly. He presents to us the remedy of riches in verse 18. He says, 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 toil is under the sun, the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.

[31 : 20] 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.

Solomon's remedy to the vanity of riches, it's very simple and very straightforward. Because he doesn't condemn riches, he doesn't condemn possessions or wealth, he only condemns the love of riches and the love of possessions and the love of wealth.

Because Solomon makes very clear to us in these verses that it's good and fitting for us to enjoy life. We're to enjoy all the things that the Lord has given to us.

We're to enjoy our work. It's good for us to enjoy our wealth if the Lord has blessed us with that. It's good for us to enjoy our possessions if we have them. It's good for us to enjoy the position that we are given at work if it has been granted to us.

Solomon says that we're to enjoy everything in life because God has given it to us. We didn't gain it, he gave it. It's a gift from him.

[32 : 35] But we're to enjoy everything in life with the right perspective, with an eternal perspective. That's the remedy to riches.

Because when you live your life with an eternal perspective, you'll see and you'll know the vanity of wealth. And Solomon, he always stresses to us the vanity of wealth. Because there's one thing in this life that money cannot buy.

That's why he stresses to us the vanity of wealth. that's his whole point. There's one thing in life money cannot buy. And yet, it's the one thing we all need.

We all need to be saved. We all need our sins forgiven. We all need the promise of eternal life. We all need Jesus in our heart.

And we need him because he has paid the price for our salvation. And he's the remedy to our restlessness and our ruin. He's the one who gives to us the eternal perspective.

[33 : 43] That's why we need him. Money can't buy it. You can only receive it by grace through faith. It's a gift freely offered to us.

Freely offered to us. Someone said on Tuesday night at Christianity Explored, the gift of salvation is freely offered to us.

Then he says, well, why don't more people take it? Why don't you take it?

Jesus says to you in the gospel, come, everyone who thirsts, come to the water. He who has no money, come, come, buy and eat.

Come, buy wine and milk without money, without price. Then he asks, why do you spend your money for that which is not bread? Why do you labor for that which does not satisfy?

[34 : 47] I? Jesus says, listen diligently to me and eat what is good. Delight yourselves in rich food. This is rich food, he says.

This is the gospel. Incline your ear, come to me, hear and your soul shall live. It's freely offered to you.

Why don't more people take it? My friend, may our response to Jesus be today, riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise, thou mine inheritance now and always, thou and thou only, first in my heart, high king of heaven, my treasure, thou art.

may that be our testimony, both for time and for eternity. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks for every good and perfect gift that comes from above.

We give thanks for all that we have, all these temporal blessings in life. And Lord, help us not to take them for granted. help us to be content with our lot.

[36 : 14] But Lord, help us not to be content until we have Jesus as our savior. Help us to be restless, Lord, until we are resting in Jesus.

O Lord, we plead that each and every one of us would see how wonderful Jesus is, that he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And help us, Lord, to trust in him, to trust in him for time and for eternity, to see him as the remedy to our ruin and to our restlessness. O Lord, bless thy word to us, we pray.

Give to us an eternal perspective that we might live our lives in light of eternity, knowing that one day soon that we will step off the scene of time into that great eternity.

O, go before us then, we pray. Keep us on the way, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We shall conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 62.

[37 : 25] Psalm 62, page 295. It's from verse 8. I accidentally wrote verse 6. Singing Psalm 62 from verse 8 down to the end of the psalm.

And this psalm, Psalm 62, it's all about making Jesus your only salvation. That's what he emphasizes. In verse 6, he only my salvation is and my strong rock is he.

Jesus is the only one who can save us. And the reason he emphasizes that is because at the end, then he says, he says in verse 10, trust ye not in oppression, in robbery be not vain, on wealth set not your hearts, when as increased is your gain.

Don't trust in anything, apart from Jesus as your saviour. So Psalm 62 from verse 8 down to the verse marked 12, we'll stand to sing to God's praise.

We hate the blazer confidence in him on timidly before him pour me round your heart what is a refuge high.

[38 : 55] surely we men are vanity, our great men are allies, in balance laid they holy are, more life and vanities.

God did not it, O pressure, in all great be not vain.

On wealth set not your hearts and us in case it is your gain.

Lord, hath it spoken once to me, yea, this I heard again, that power to almighty God, our Lord, doth the pertain, praise, yea, mercy also unto thee belongs, O Lord, our Lord, for thou according according to his word, rewardest everyone.
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.