



## ecclesiastes 5:8-20

*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. 9 But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.*

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

*11 When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?*

*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.*

*13 There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, 14 and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.*

*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. 16 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? 17 Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.*

*18 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.*

*19 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. 20 For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.*

## commentary

In 5:8-20, Solomon goes into discussing the abuses and dissatisfaction coming from wealth. He talks about how discontentment arises in the lives of those who are not living in God's will.

**8-9** Solomon states that, while it shocks us that there are oppressed people in certain "districts," it shouldn't. If it were not for the hoarding practices of those high in power and the wealthy, there would be not be so much oppression. The desire to gain more money, albeit through unethical methods, is the reason for the oppression we see around us.

The King gets his share of all that is worked for, but the hierarchy of those underneath him fight and claw to get the remaining wealth left over. They use secretive means and manipulate "the system" in order to get what they want at the expense of those below them. In this way, they have their eye on the wealth that would otherwise go to the masses.

A Christian cannot read these verses and forget to remember the many times in scripture God equates true religion and worship with serving those who are oppressed. It is our duty to be countercultural in this way - that we show compassion for those who are "hurting and hopeless like sheep without a shepherd." The prayer to "give us this day our daily bread" cannot be divorced from a deep desire to give to those in need and to serve those who are being oppressed.

In this verse and the following, Solomon then goes into a discourse describing the discontentment that comes to those who put their hope in wealth

**10** The first reason for discontentment is that of dissatisfaction. Those who put their identity and hope in wealth are never satisfied because there is always something better to have. They can never make enough money to meet the needs of their desires.

**11** "Those," referring to the ones who "consume them," could actually be translated "those parasites." As their wealth grows, so do the number of people or places the money disappears to. As one makes more money, there seems to be more places to spend it. The growing wealth is quickly eaten up by a growing standard of living. All this is driven by the desire to want more. Discontentment is enflamed by wanting more.

**12** Discontentment can also be augmented in our hearts with worries. It is no wonder why worries are more common with those who have more to protect. "What is going to happen with my wealth?" "How should I invest it?" "How do I protect it?" "Can I really trust my friends? Maybe they like me just because of what I have?" And the list goes on and on of worries that come with wealth. Conversely, the man who lives a more simple life and works hard to earn his keep is the one who sleeps well at night. He has used no deception, exploitation, or canine to get what he owns. Therefore, he sleeps well with few worries and with a clear conscience.

**13** This can all result in the harming of those who hoard their wealth with no concern for the oppressed. Those wealthiest people who give away much of their fortune in philanthropic goodwill are surely to be admired. It is those who hoard it who end up with a greater sense of discontentment.

**14** Unwarranted misfortunes are also the source of discontentment. This may come upon any type of person, leaving them with nothing.

**15-17** Finally, Solomon identifies that a source of discontentment is the toil that comes with wanting so much. It is foolishness to gain wealth, but then never be able to enjoy the benefits of it because one is working so much to gain more. He says from experience that one is better to have the perspective that you come into the world with nothing and leave with nothing. In between, a person should enjoy whatever comes his way. Toil, if not enjoyed, can result in darkness, loneliness, frustration, affliction, and anger. This kind of dark existence is therefore only

exterminated with light when one encounters God. Only with a desire for Christ is all else in life possibly enjoyed to its fullness.

**18-19** It is in the current state of our present existence where we learn to be content. It is easy to be content when there are no worries and things are going well. It is another story when things are not going well and worries loom over our heads. Solomon shares that everything, even our toilsome labor can be enjoyed. This ability to enjoy, no matter what our lot, is a gift from God. Contentment is not only something that we develop, but it is ultimately given by God. He enables us to be satisfied and to enjoy our existence during this short life on earth.

**20** Contentment is ultimately an issue of the condition of our hearts. Where our hearts are aligned shows where we find our hope. If our hearts are aligned with our wealth and perceived success, we will never be satisfied because we are depending on happiness from the things under the sun. As Solomon has so often said in this book, this is madness, like chasing the wind. However, if a person has his heart intent on seeking God and loving Jesus, he has found the ultimate source of satisfaction. Christ is sufficient! The person who realizes this and lives life accordingly does not see pursuing things as the end goal on the road to satisfaction. Rather, he sets the course of his life's pursuit on Jesus. Everything else is merely extraneous or incidental. As such, since he is living his life within the will of God, God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. The person who has his goal set on Christ has no time or desire to let anything else take away from the gladness he has in loving Jesus.

## personal reflection

**Sunday** - Reflect on today's sermon. Did anything challenge you? What will you change as a result of hearing God's word?

**Monday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:8-9. Who in your area is oppressed? Is there any way you can show them God's love and grace? Consider how God gave himself for you. How is that similar to you giving to the oppressed?

**Tuesday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:10-17. Of the 6 things we discussed on Sunday that add to a person's discontentment, which one(s) do you, in particular, struggle with? Why? How is this related to the desires of your heart? In contrast to the things we so desperately seek in this world, how is Jesus a contrast in that he brings lasting satisfaction?

**Wednesday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:10-11. What are the "parasites" you observe in your life? In other words, what eats away at your wealth or goods in a detrimental way?

**Thursday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:12. How have you been sleeping at night? How is your sleep related to your dependence on God or things of this world? How can you thank God and/or ask him for help with this?

**Friday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:18-19. Take some time to consider your “lot in life.” What kind of life has God chosen to give you? How does he want you to enjoy it, no matter what your lot? Consider the fact that God enables you to enjoy, accept, or be happy with life. Where is he enabling you? How might you pray about this? What choice might you make today to be content?

**Saturday** - Reflect on Ecclesiastes 5:20. Could your life be described as “occupied with gladness of heart?” How is the direction of your heart linked to your contentment? How might an occupation with gladness of heart keep you from reflecting on what might otherwise lead to discontentment?

## group discussion

### Ice Breaker: What are you thankful for this time of year?

#### Read together Ecclesiastes 5:8-9.

1. Why is showing compassion to the oppressed an expression of thanksgiving to God?
2. How is showing compassion for the oppressed counter-cultural?

#### Read together Ecclesiastes 5:10-17.

3. What are some of the potential problems Solomon lists with regard to wanting wealth and accumulating goods?
4. Why do you think the desire for wealth is so closely linked with discontentment?
5. Does this mean that it is always a detriment to want wealth? If “yes,” then why? If “no,” then how is it possible to want wealth in a way that does not lead to discontentment (hint: look ahead in this passage to vs. 18-20)?
6. Verse 11 could read “as goods increase, so do those [parasites] who consume them.” What kind of “parasites” have you observed that consume goods?
7. In verse 17, there is a disturbing picture of a man who is consumed with toil. How might v. 18-20 offer him hope?
8. How is contentment related to the condition of your heart?
9. How is Jesus the answer to the problems Solomon expresses in this passage?

