

It does not satisfy. Part of a series preached on the book of Ecclesiastes at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC, February 5, 2017 by Rev. Herb Hilder

Lessons: ECCLESIASTES 5:10-20
LUKE 12:13-21

Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther, perceptively once observed, "There are three conversions necessary: the conversion of the heart, mind and the purse."

If any of us think the first two involve a life time of mirror up to our face self-examination, Make no mistake; conversion of the purse is one of the hardest.

For money remains in many communities of faith, a proverbial elephant in the room.

I've known believers, who speak openly and frankly in front of their children about sex, death and all manner of difficult subjects,
But go into the bedroom and close the door when they want to talk about money.

Yet Jesus spoke about money more frequently than any other subject except the Kingdom of God
He gave an unusual amount of time and energy to the money question.

The range of his concern is huge: from the parable of the sower to the parable of the rich farmer (this morning's reading from Luke's Gospel)

From the encounter with the rich young ruler to the encounter with Zacchaeus;

From the teachings on trust in Matthew 6 to the teachings on the dangers of wealth in Luke 6.

Here in this morning's reading from our continuing study and reflection on the book of Ecclesiastes – counsel on how to live a life that matters – we really should not be surprised at the straight from the hip, no nonsense words of the Preacher.

Between the Preacher's counsel and Jesus' parable of the rich farmer there is an important viewpoint or perspective set before us – again!!

First, *nowhere in scripture – Old or New Testament – are people criticized for being wealthy.* The Gospels and Paul's letters particularly draw attention to those who used their wealth to help the poor and needy,

Helped the disciples and later Paul and Timothy.

There was with these wealthy people a willingness to share

The sense that they were stewards of God's gracious gifts – not owners

So, wealth per se is not the issue addressed in either text.

The issue is idolatry. In this case, money and wealth as idols competing with God.

Both texts make a frontal assault on those who “love money” – not how it can help others, make this world a better place for all,

Rather the idolatry comes when money and wealth are used only to enrich the life of the possessor.

President Franklin Roosevelt said in one of his 100 day speeches,

The test of progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

Second general observation, *the identity of the Preacher has long been thought to be King Solomon. If so, then the Preacher was in his time an incredibly wealthy individual.*

Therefore, when people like Solomon, or today’s wealthy like Bill and Melinda Gates, or Warren Buffet speak about the dangers that will follow those who love money – you know they are speaking from personal experience – not sour grapes!

Solomon has credibility.

Now, whether we choose to listen or see this as just more prattling on – is up to each of us

However, no one can ever say about Ecclesiastes as he writes these words,

He doesn't know about what he is talking
Take heed – HE MOST CERTAINLY DOES!!

About lovers of money,
Those who make money an idol to which they
devote all their energies, what does the Preacher
say?

Lovers of money will never be satisfied (vs.10).

Those who love money are never satisfied, for them
there is never enough.

A lover of money has a mindset that sees “enough”
as the thing they do not have.

They cannot see that consumption never results in
contentment,

Preoccupation with consumption only results in
more consumption

Like the rich farmer in the parable – amassing
wealth becomes the goal in life – solely to make
oneself comfortable.

Lovers of money so easily lose touch with the wider
world's needs.

The needs immediately around them.

*For lovers of money, consumption becomes a curse that
even afflicts one's sleep (vs.12)*

Often says the Preacher those who love
money and see it as all important are incessantly
preoccupied with pushing the limits of
consumption.

That is their sole goal in life
 The preacher says – Trust me – this will not bring
 peaceful or restful sleep
 For often you will become preoccupied with how
 you can get more
 As well as how to secure from loss what you have!

*For lovers of money, however much you have, amass,
 clutch onto – surprise!!! Someday like everyone else,
 your will die.*

You may die in greater comfort, able to build a
 bigger monument with your name across the front,
 But death remains the great equalizer
 You cannot take your money with you – armoured
 cars have never been part of funeral processions in
 which I have been involved!

Ecclesiastes is spot on

¹⁵As they came from their mother's womb, so they shall go
 again, naked as they came; they shall take nothing for their
 toil, which they may carry away with their hands (Eccl.

5:15)

To attempt to secure permanent gain by loving
 money and wealth is nothing but says Ecclesiastes
 in one of his many brilliant turns for phrase

Toiling for the wind (vs. 16)-

A vain exercise at best.

Sad isn't it.

You may be thinking, well this could never happen to me
 I don't have Solomon's bank balance
 I have never been wealthy
 I don't live the high life
 I am not a conspicuous consumer.

The danger of becoming a lover of money, a lover of wealth is not necessarily limited by or restricted to big bank balances

Nor is the sort of person described either by Ecclesiastes or Jesus definitely a non-believer

Money assuming a godlike place in our lives

Becoming an idol -competing with a trust in God and thankful heart for His provision in daily life can happen to ANYONE.

How so?

Jesus gives us a clue when he uses the word "mammon" in speaking about money.

You cannot serve God and mammon (Luke 16:13)

Jesus saw money as a power, a rival god.

Yes, it had the power to do good,

To make a significant and important difference in peoples' lives – particularly the lives of the marginalized

But money also has a 'dark side'

It is this dark side alluded to in both readings this morning.

Money is a power with a life of its own

It must have supremacy.

It must crowd out all else.

If left on its own it is not willing to rest contented in its proper place alongside other things we value!

If I knew about the dark side and the light side of money – I never realized how dangerous the one and how life freeing the other until early in my ministry I read Richard Foster’s Money Sex and Power (1985)

Foster writes clearly, succinctly and with plenty of Biblical back up for points made.

I remain indebted to his book – personally and professionally.

Must though tell you a story about the first time I recommended the reading of the book Unknown to me, one of the members of the congregation I then served strode into the local bookstore that following week and when asked by the sales clerk could she be of particular assistance, My parishioner stridently and excited said, “yes, I want Money, Sex and Power”.

My parishioner quickly realized how that had come across and before she could tone down the request, the sales clerk replied, “Don’t we all dear” They both laughed and went off to see if they had Foster’s book in stock

The following week – I happened to be walking in front of the Bookstore and the same sales clerk waved at me to come in

She then inquisitively said to me, “Herb, what are you preaching up the street at St. Andrew’s?” She then recounted the story of my parishioner’s request for the book. More laughter

There is nothing neutral about money. It is not just a medium of exchange. It has a dark side that by God’s help and the Spirit’s guidance we must vigilantly not cross into for very long.

Lest any of us fall into the perspective of the richer farmer or a “lover” of money as described by Ecclesiastes.

How then shall we live a life that matters in the area of money and wealth?

Recognize money’s dark side, as well as its light side

Without personal and spiritual governors or brakes – money will most assuredly downplay or marginalize our need to trust in God’s provision for all our needs and a considerable number of our wants

Money and its accumulation can begin to make us believe that we really do not have to trust God,

Look to Him

Depend upon Him

Relationship with him will be superseded by acquiring and surrounding ourselves with stuff.

For we will begin to hear with greater power the beguiling voices that tell us that if we have this or

that, our lives will be fulfilling, contented and happy.

We will begin to confuse wealth with moral integrity.

We will begin to see and view economics and business as the most if not the sole purpose in life.

I think that is a real danger in the political leadership of people like the Trumpster or the Canadian Conservative candidate wannabe Kevin O'Leary

Both see the whole of life as a business plan and model

Listen to them and if they are not talking about themselves – which they do a lot – their speeches are peppered with business jargon

All decisions are made on the basis of profit and loss.

The created order – well to them and others like them – they would never even consider anything but a view where the created order is humanity's own possession to be endless manipulated and exploited in their own interests!

Recognizing that money as an idol will not be easily unmasked.

The world in which you and I live is consumer driven.

Every day we are bombarded by words, pictures, jingles, subliminal images that say stuff, the latest

stuff by the way, creature comforts, toys that whirr and light up is the sole way to peace, fulfillment and a sense of content

While such may for a short time, in the long run, the contentment only lasts until the next shiny thing comes along

Landfills are chock a block with those things we thought would bring ultimate fulfillment and peace
As well when the dark side of money begins to wrap itself around us, we become reluctant to share what we have with others.

I have been in too many church meetings where the cry of what if we don't have enough for ourselves is the deciding mantra in a decision to give. The result is that no giving is done — fears of not enough for ourselves.

Important point to remember — *if we wait to give until we have ENOUGH, we will never give anything away!*

Be clear in your own thinking what is a need and what is a want. — again very hard...for:

Our powers of rationalization are great!

The siren voices of consumer society are ceaseless and sneaky

The result unless we are very, very careful is that needs and wants are jumbled up and confused in our seeing and perspective

Try to avoid impulse purchases

Learn the benefits of delayed self-gratification – to practice it is a sign of maturity.
Practice sober second thought – much less costly than buyer’s remorse!

*Be grateful for all that you have and can enjoy.
Stop being resentful, embittered or jealous for what others have and you do not.*

This is the counsel of Ecclesiastes in the last verses
Jessica read this morning

¹⁸This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot. ¹⁹Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God. ²⁰For they will scarcely brood over the days of their lives, because God keeps them occupied with the joy of their hearts. Vs, 18-20

After outlining the negative effects of being money mad,
Ecclesiastes exposes the satisfaction and grace that shines on the money-sane.

For the Preacher, enjoyment is a very serious matter.

Such enjoyment can only happen if we refuse to “buy into” an approach to life that centres upon the acquisition of and securing at all costs – money and possessions.

Realize that everything we have, all that we are is a gift from a lavish and generous God (vs. 19)

The ability to enjoy simple pleasures is itself divinely inspired.

The rich farmer in Jesus' parable forgets that his good fortune is a miraculous gift from God.

Remember in Biblical times, the great scourge was drought.

Bumper crops were viewed as gifts of God – for they provided for the future, when lean years would arrive.

In God's economy – big harvests are for the poor – not for the owner's reveling in profit!

Model such behavior and perspective to your nearest and dearest.

Some parents see it as akin to violation of an Official Secrets Act if they speak openly in front of their children about "money".

My parents were open about discussing their financial situation with me – always in an age sensitive and appropriate way.

I hope that Katharine and I have been as open with our girls – not only in the matter of saving and spending, but also warning them that there is both a dark side and a light side about money.

I learned from my Dad to treat ALL people with respect, regardless of how much money they had

Though some of his customers at the store and some on his elders' district and his business associates in the city were very wealthy and influential in the community,
He did not treat them any differently or toady up to them because they had "money".

In fact when church people who some assumed were generous givers said that "if things are not done my way, then I will be withdrawing my contributions"

His reaction was universal – he would counsel the minister – he'd heard that the minister was facing such a threat-- do not allow St. Andrew's, Welland to be ransomed or blackmailed by such people....

Stand up to them and know that I will support you.

Ecclesiastes' and Jesus through this particular parable have as one of their goals to help us live lives that really matter,
Lives that have meaning and purpose,
we must come then to terms with how we view, handle and behave around money and wealth – for we are surrounded and under constant threat to listen to and hear the world's voices over that of the firm but gentle voice of the Lord God's. AMEN