

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of a labourer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep. There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, 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. 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. 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.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

What would it take to make you happy? If you were to buy into all the hype that the lottery corporations put forth, you would have to believe that “winning it big” in the lottery is the key to happiness. Let’s see your Lotto 649 happy dance, one ad says. Dream big, says another. In the ads, the people who win are always happy, rejoicing in the wonderful new lifestyle they will be able to enjoy.

I imagine that everyone is familiar with the expression, “Money can’t buy happiness”. There are even studies which prove this is true. Kennon Sheldon, University of Missouri [Columbia] psychology professor, said, “We consistently find that people who say money is most important to them are [the unhappiest].” (Gaming Magazine, April 17, 2002) I once had a file of old newspaper articles that tell the stories of lottery winners who, after winning, had much less happy lives. In several cases, families started to argue about the money and what was due to them, wasting the gain on legal fees and court costs. Several people were involved in messy divorces. Some squandered the money in bad investments and went bankrupt. How appropriate are the words of St. Paul, who said, *But 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. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.* (1 Timothy 6:9-10 - ESV)

What would it take to make you happy? That is the question that runs throughout the book of Ecclesiastes, as Solomon shares a bit of the wisdom for which he was famous. Ecclesiastes seems to come from a man looking back over the years of his life and the lessons he has learned. And what does Solomon conclude? *Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.* (Ecclesiastes 1:2 - ESV) His own experiences have taught him that wealth, wisdom, work, pleasure and the things of this world are empty, meaningless, and unsatisfying in and of themselves.

Solomon is not a pessimist. Rather, he sees that it is God alone who is able to give to those who live life under His gracious hand what the world, the things of the world, and even the wealth of the world cannot give in and of themselves. *There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?* (Ecclesiastes 2:24-25 - ESV), Solomon says. That is what we want to do—to find our joy, our enthusiasm, our *joie de vivre* in God’s goodness at work in us, for in Him we can go for the gusto, and truly enjoy life as God intends.

Our text today is only one part of Solomon’s teaching on enjoying God’s gifts. It also focusses on the first thing that most people look to as the answer for life’s concerns: money. Far too many people make the pursuit of riches their sole or primary aim in life. To them, Solomon says: *He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.*

I have heard people say that the only ones who believe that money can’t buy happiness are those who don’t have any money. But Solomon had money. It might be a toss-up to whether Solomon or Job was the wealthiest man in the bible. Scripture does

say: ***Thus King Solomon excelled all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom.*** (1 Kings 10:23 - ESV) At the dedication of the temple, he offered to the Lord 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats. (1 Kings 8:63) After the temple was built, Solomon had a palace built for himself. We are told: ***“Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold, besides that which came from the explorers and from the business of the merchants, and from all the kings of the west and from the governors of the land.”*** (1 Kings 10:14–15, ESV) That would be about 25 tons of gold, meaning an annual income in today’s dollars of \$1,300,000,000.00—and that was just part of his income. The man was well off.

Solomon had wealth—but he also learned that a mind focussed on riches would not find any real or lasting satisfaction in life. There is a stewardship lesson here: God can, and does give wealth to people. In all that God provides, we see His gifts first given to us to be used for His glory. Part of that purpose of God is that we care for our family. The firstfruits, as Scripture often tells us are to be returned to God, as a reminder that *we give thee but thine own, whate’r the gift may be.* (LSB 781, st. 1) Yet many do not return anything to the Lord. They do not use their riches to help and support others in their needs. As Solomon notes: ***There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture.*** Instead of using our riches in accordance with God’s plans and purposes, we seek only our good and try to satisfy our desires. Somehow, in the midst of this attitude, money becomes a curse, and often fails to do what we hope it can do.

But Solomon’s main focus isn’t to set forth a big stewardship lesson here. Don’t get me wrong—stewardship is important. God calls us to faithfully support His church, its workers and the mission that we carry out in the world. Yet the greater lesson today is a faith lesson. Money can have an impact on our faith. It can separate us from God. We hear that sad comment of Jesus in our Gospel lesson today: ***“How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”*** (Mark 10:23 - ESV) This statement comes from a discussion He has just had with a young man, who came to him for spiritual guidance. Jesus saw in this man a sincere heart. Mark tells us: ***And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.*** (Mark 10:21-22 - ESV)

If money can’t buy happiness, then what will make us happy? Our text 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 toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. 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.***

It is by the grace of God that we find contentment and joy in life. Without Him, everything is vanity, as Solomon says. It is empty, meaningless—a striving after wind. Without the grace that God has made known to us in Christ, the whole of life is empty and futile, because it always leads to the same conclusion: our sin brings forth death, and the eternal torment of hell. This is the real lesson that Solomon teaches about the happy life: without God, nothing really matters, because it always ends the same, sad way. But when God’s grace fills our hearts and lives, then life is worth living. In Christ, we can go for the gusto. Someone has said that the word ‘grace’ tells us of *God’s Riches at Christ’s Expense*. Paul says: ***For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*** (2 Corinthians 8:9 - ESV) This is the real treasure we have—that Jesus Christ died for us on the cross, and rose again that we will live in Him. This is the one treasure we can carry through life—and through the gate of death. Christ stretches out His hands on the cross, as the curse of God’s judgement against our sin is placed on Him—and those hands extend in blessing to tell us we are forgiven. The angel tells the women at the tomb, ***He is not here, for he has risen, as he said.*** (Matthew 28:6 - ESV) And we know, from Jesus’ own promise: ***Because I live, you also will live.*** (John 14:19 - ESV)

The life we live in Christ includes the here and now, although what we have here is only a pale foreshadowing of the glories that are yet to be revealed. We see all that we are, all that we have, and all that happens day by day as happening under the watchful eye of our loving God. We know that He has already prepared a wonderful retirement home for us. He will grant us a life of real ease and luxury in the glory of His heavenly kingdom. As we work, eat, and go through each new day, we do it in the firm confidence that all that really matters is well provided for us, through God’s grace to us in Christ.

When faith in Christ fills the heart and guides our lives, then we experience the gusto of life that Solomon found: ***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 wasn’t happy when his wealth ruled his life—but he learned that he could be happy in life when he saw

every day as a gift of a great and loving God. When we, trusting in the dying and rising Saviour view all that life is, or all that life brings, under God's grace, then whether we have money or we don't have money, we go for the gusto, because God brings us the joy that sees the greatest treasure—the treasure that is ours in Jesus Christ. Be thankful for what you have today and enjoy it, and joyfully do whatever it is you have to do today because with Jesus, ***you*** are the richest person in the world. Amen.