

“Riches are Meaningless”

1 Kings 3:5-14

Clint A. Oppermann
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
December 30, 2007



Good morning! I am so happy to be able to bring the message to you again on this Lord's Day in brother Baxter's absence. I find that there is nothing more rewarding than studying God's word, digesting it, and presenting it in a way so as to impact your daily lives. Hopefully you'll find this morning's lesson to be particularly useful. The topic is one that affects almost everyone to some extent. Personally, I've struggled with this sin to one degree or another for the better part of 20 years. It's only been in the last few years that I've actually been able master it: I hope permanently with God's help. This morning we will be studying the love of money.

Let's face it, greed pervades humanity. It always has and it always will. But today we see it on a scale so incredible that only time in modern history to rival it was the period of the robber barons near the turn of the 20th century. Remember, those were the days of Rockefeller, Carnegie, Vanderbilt and Ford. According to Alpha, the leading magazine for the hedge fund industry, the top 25 hedge fund managers made an average of \$570 million in 2006. That's \$570 million for one year's worth of work! By the time I finish this sermon, the average of these guys will have made twice what the average American makes in one year. Pretty breathtaking, isn't it?

Now, if you're making hundreds of millions of dollars per year, what do you do with all of that loot? Let me give you some hints – huge mansions, mega yachts, personal jets, and fast cars. I have the perfect mansion in mind for any one of these guys. It is located just up the road from the queen of England (Windsor Castle) and Elton John. Here is how Forbes magazine describes this mansion:

“Your blood may not run blue, but with enough green you can still live near—and like—royalty. Updown Court is currently the most expensive residence in the world, costing about \$50 million more than the priciest U.S. home. The brand-new property is totally over the top, with 103 rooms, five swimming pools and 24-carat-gold leafing on the study's mosaic floor. There's a squash court, bowling alley, tennis court, 50-seat screening room, heated marble driveway and helipad. All eight of your limousines will fit in the underground garage.”

This opulence can be yours for a mere \$122.2 million.

Now that you have a place to rest your head, let's recommend an appropriate car. No self-respecting industrialist would be caught dead driving a BMW, Jaguar or Mercedes...these are cars of the masses. But what about a Bugatti Veyron, billed as

the world's fastest, most expensive and most exclusive factory-built car? Its powerplant has four turbochargers and pumps out 1,001 horsepower. It can travel over 250 mph and accelerates to 62 mph in 2.5 seconds. Here's what the editor in chief of Car and Driver had to say about the Bugatti. "It's a magical car to drive because it has so much power. You floor it at 180 and it shoves you into the seat harder than a standard car does in third gear at 20 mph." For the modern-day master of the universe, the car's \$1.2 million price is chump change and you're guaranteed that you'll be only one of 300 owners in the entire world.

Wealth is being created at a rate not seen in at least 100 years and greed permeates our very existence. It is everywhere - from the mogul making millions to the guy living in a house, driving a car, and watching a TV he can't afford. Everybody wants to grab their fair share! How can we resist these temptations? What can we do to keep our perspective? How can we keep our lives centered on God? Thankfully, our Bibles and the writings of the inspired King Solomon can help us as we resist the sin of greed.

Let's open our Bibles over to the Old Testament book of **1 Kings**. I will be reading from **1 Kings 3:5-14**. Our Bibles read:

⁵ At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." ⁶ Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. ⁷ "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹ So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" ¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for-both riches and honor-so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. ¹⁴ And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."

Here we notice in **verse 5** that God appears to Solomon in a dream and tells him to ask for anything he wants. In **verse 9**, Solomon asks for wisdom and this pleased the Lord. We see in **verse 12** that Solomon's wish is granted and Solomon became the wisest human ever to have walked the face of the earth. But on top of that,

things he didn't wish for were also granted him. He became spectacularly wealthy and famous. He had no equal among kings during his lifetime.

1 Kings 10:14-15 gives us some idea of King Solomon's income and wealth. **1 Kings 10:14-15** reads:

¹⁴ The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, ¹⁵ not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land.

Because of God's promise, King Solomon became a shrewd ruler and businessman. He received income in gold and revenues from trading. The 666 talents of gold he received annually translate to about 50,000 pounds using today's standard of measurement. At today's price of \$825 per ounce, Solomon's yearly income was the equivalent of \$660 million plus the revenues that came from trading. Solomon made the equivalent of perhaps \$1 billion per year! Wow! He was as rich as today's hedge fund billionaires, far more famous, and possessed unrivaled wisdom. Excepting Jesus, we can probably learn more from him about the perils of money than any other person that has lived.

Let's observe what the inspired King Solomon had to say about the love of money and riches. Let's turn our Bibles over to the book of **Ecclesiastes** and notice **chapter 5 verses 10-15**. The scripture reads:

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.

In this passage King Solomon shares his wisdom about the meaningless of riches. He had great wisdom and he was also extremely wealthy so his perspective should matter much to us here today. Let's examine what he says about riches and the love of money.

The first statement he makes is that "***whoever loves money never has money enough***" and "***whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income.***" That is how greed works. It doesn't matter how much you have. If you love money, you'll always want more. If you have \$40,000, and you love money, then you'll want \$50,000. If you have \$4 million, and you're greedy, then you'll want \$5 million. If you have \$4 billion, and you love money, then you'll want \$5 billion. You'll never be satisfied. The only thing that changes is the number of zeros in your net worth. Ted

Turner, the billionaire founder of CNN, said "Life is a game. Money is how we keep score." If life is only a game and money is truly the only scorecard as Mr. Turner asserts, then I guess the winners are those that run up the score by accumulating as much wealth as possible. You see, the love of money is insatiable. It is a thirst that can never be satisfied. Solomon calls this meaningless at the end of **verse 10**.

He goes on to say in **verse 11**, that ***"as goods increase, so do those that consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?"*** As a person accumulates more wealth and increases his expenditures on stuff, then it follows that more people will use the possessions and they will end up being little more than eye candy to the owner. Who needs to live next to the queen in a 103 room mansion with 5 swimming pools? Most of the space will never be used! Jay Leno, the host of the Tonight Show, is said to have 80 cars and 80 motorcycles. I wonder if one of them is the Bugatti Veyron? Most of these just sit there in his 3 football-field size warehouses. He could drive one a day and over the course of a year, he would have only driven each twice. Solomon's wisdom shows through. Either the possessions end up being used by others or they largely go unused since there is only so much time in a day.

The rich also have much more to worry about than the poor as wealth brings extra anxiety. In **verse 12**, Solomon states that ***"the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep."*** **Verse 13** says hoarded wealth can harm its owner. And **verse 14** goes on to say that wealth can be lost through some misfortune. Wealthy people spend a lot of time thinking about money. They spend an inordinate amount of time working to accumulate it and investing it to make it grow to an even larger amount. They continuously live in fear of losing it in an awful business decision or terrible investment. The laborer, on the other hand, enjoys sweet sleep. He's not continuously worried about making more and more money nor is he anxious about avoiding loss. He works, enjoys his time off with his family and other loved ones, and enjoys restful sleep almost every night.

Solomon closes in **verse 15** by saying that a man departs from the world the same way he came – naked. This was his way of saying that you can't take it with you! The implication is that we should not waste our time trying to accumulate more and more wealth because the poor and the rich die in the exact same way. Sure, the latter may be buried in a little finer clothes and have a bigger tombstone. But what good does it actually do? They're both dead!

Riches are meaningless according to King Solomon, the wisest and one of the richest persons to have ever lived. This is because the love of money can never be satisfied, most goods accumulated by the wealthy are not used by the owners, wealth brings added anxiety, and you can't take it with you.

But did Solomon miss anything? I think so. I believe he actually missed that which was most important to us here today. Fortunately, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ picked up these thoughts in the New Testament. Let's flip our Bibles over to the book of **Matthew** where I will be reading from the 6th chapter, verses 19-24. **Matthew 6:19-24** reads:

¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²²"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

In addition to Solomon's worldly reasons as to why riches are meaningless, Jesus gives us an even more important spiritual reason. Jesus directs us to not store up for ourselves temporal treasures on earth but rather to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven. ***"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*** He goes on to say that it is impossible to serve two masters and that we can not serve both God and Money. It is impossible to love God and love money! The eternal resting place for your soul depends in part on your attitude towards money. It is an either or...either you love God or you love money but you can't love both. According to our Lord, greed and riches are even less than meaningless. They may actually cost you your soul!

I have struggled with this sin for many years and it has only been during the last few that I've actually been able to over come it. My desire to continue to master it in large part drove my decision to leave my career. Wealth and its trappings have some allure: I will be the first to admit that. But loving money will also cause you serious distress from time-to-time during this life and will cause you to lose your soul during the next. Let us remember Jesus' words in **Matthew 16:26** where he states, ***"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?"*** I choose loving God! I choose giving up the chase for more riches! My soul is far too precious to me. Is yours precious to you?

Greed, like any other sin, can be forgiven. Jesus' blood will cover it. All you have to do is have faith that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for your sins, confess this faith, repent from your sins, and allow yourself to be immersed in the cleansing waters of baptism. When you arise out of the waters you will be sinless...and completely forgiven for every sin that you have committed prior to that point. If you are a Christian but have stumbled and need to repent, there is hope for you as well. In either case, won't you come forward as we stand and sing the song of invitation. Let's stand and sing.

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org