

Ecclesiastes
Rich Man, Poor Man

Lesson #6 for February 10, 2007

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5.

1. In this lesson Solomon talks about what we may, or may not, gain in a lifetime on earth.
2. Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7. Why did people go to the temple? If the Israelites were supposed to go to the temple to learn, what provisions were made for that learning? Was the primary method of teaching through the sacrificial system? What are we supposed to learn from the sacrificial system about right and wrong? About daily living? About God? Why weren't there many temples in various parts of the country instead of just one?
3. Next, Solomon discusses some of the mistakes people make when they come before God. Why do many people think they need to do all the talking when they approach God? The purpose of coming to God is to learn! In our day when we approach God, do we do most of the talking?
4. Other people come to God worrying about many things! What do we accomplish by worrying? Does worrying improve our approach to God?
5. Read Ecclesiastes 5:4,5. These verses recommend that if you approach God and promise to do something, do it as quickly as possible. Shouldn't a promise to God be even more carefully fulfilled than any promise to a human being? Remember that in all your relationships with God, he is still in charge! Approach him with reverence and respect. (Ecclesiastes 5:6,7)
6. What if, for some reason, you are not able to fulfill a promise to God? Don't stop coming to him even if you have failed in your promise! Read Matthew 18:21-23; Romans 2:4; and 1 John 2:1. God wants you much more than he wants your money!
7. What are the reasons why people sometimes fail to meet their obligations to God? Maybe you find that your obligations to government are so great that you can't meet your obligations to God. Without your money the government can't function. So how should a Christian relate to the government?
8. How should a Christian respond when he sees injustice being done? What if the injustice is not just in the government but in the church? (Ecclesiastes 5:8,9)
9. Read Ecclesiastes 5:10-12. Another major reason why people fail to meet their commitments to God and to the government is because they want more for themselves. Is there any limit to this wanting? What advantages are there to being rich? Are there any advantages to being poor?
10. One relentless pursuit that we see in the world around us is the desire to have more. Is it God's plan that some people should have more than others? Why? Does God hold us responsible if we have more than others? What are the responsibilities of the rich toward the poor? Do the rich gain anything from their money except more worry? Eugene Peterson in his *Message* paraphrase says, "The more loot you get, the more looters show up. And what fun is that—to be robbed in broad daylight!" (Ecclesiastes 5:11)
11. Jesus emphasized the point that the poor will always be with us. (Matthew 26:11)
12. What are the primary reasons for poverty? A poor education? Sickness? Bad luck? An oppressive government? The Bible has a number of things to say about justice for the poor.

Read Exodus 23:6; Leviticus 19:15; Leviticus 25:39-46; Deuteronomy 15:7,11; 24:14,15.

13. In light of what you know from Scripture, who do you think is more easily savable, a rich man or a poor man?
14. Jesus seems to suggest in the New Testament that it's harder for rich people to get into heaven! What inherent characteristics of wealth make the rich less responsive to the Gospel? (Matthew 19:23,24)
15. Does God intend for some people to have more and some people to have less? When Jesus came to this earth, he lived among the poor. Certainly, he could have been born into any family on the earth! Why did he choose to live among the poor?
16. How does God regard you and your finances? Are you generous in giving to the church? Are you faithful in paying your tithes?
17. Read Malachi 3:10. Do we really believe that God will open the windows of heaven?
18. Isn't it obvious to everyone that we all ultimately depend upon the bounties of the earth for our living and for our existence? Who gives that abundance? As Solomon says, "Even a king depends on the harvest." (Ecclesiastes 5:9, *GNB*)
19. What does God expect back from us in exchange for his bounties? Does God intend that we share equally with him and with needy people the resources that he gives to us? Is it fair that some get \$50 million bonuses at the end of the year while others can barely earn enough food to feed their families? Do those who get the \$50 million bonuses really produce that much more than others around them? Are their services really that valuable or are they reaping the results of oppression of others?
20. James 5:1-8 makes it very clear that God is not happy with those who oppress others and take what rightfully belongs to another. Would you agree with the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* when it says, "No question, those who have made themselves rich through the exploitation of the poor will find themselves face to face with an angry God"?
21. Read Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31. Is it true that the judgment will hang on one question only: How have we treated the poor, the outcast, the prisoners and the hungry? Could you have a correct and complete theology and still be lost? Why does Jesus suggest that this is the one criterion in the judgment? There is no mention of keeping the commandments, witnessing to others or Bible study! Is there a direct relationship between good theology (our picture of God) and good works?
22. Does all of this suggest what our relationship to God should be? Are we slaves? Are we servants? Are we hired hands? Or could we really be friends? (John 15:15)
23. Read Luke 12:13-21. What do you think Solomon would say to this farmer? Had Solomon himself built "bigger barns"?
24. In our world it seems that money can buy just about anything! And it is very easy to slip into the mold where we think we don't even need to discuss what we're going to use the money for, just give us the money. Pretty soon the means transcend the end! "Money doesn't make one happy, but it sure makes misery a lot more comfortable!"
25. Is it possible that "Lust for money brings trouble and nothing but trouble"? (1 Timothy 6:10, *The Message*) Is it true that "The love of money is the root of all evil"? (*KJV*)
26. "You can't buy love, but money makes shopping for it a lot more fun." Is the pursuit of money an addiction? Why is it that those who have money seem to always want more?

How can Christians avoid that pitfall?

27. How can we decide if money has become an idol in our lives? In the middle of the night when you wake up, what do you think about? What is the true center of your universe?
28. Read Ecclesiastes 5:14-17. Is it really useless to work hard, to earn a good living, to live in a good house and to drive a good car, if when you die, you leave with nothing more than what you came with? Why does Solomon keep coming back to this point?
29. Read Matthew 16:24-26. Do these verses affect you? How much of your life is spent "chasing the wind"? How much is mere "smoke"? And when you come down to the end of your life if you feel that much of it has been wasted, what would you give in exchange for a new life or a guarantee of a place in heaven?
30. Satan will use any means he can discover to try to bind you to this earth. What are the cords that he uses on you? Are those temptations more important in your life than your relationship with God? Or is God the true center of your life?
31. Ellen White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 44:

In giving ourselves to God, we must necessarily give up all that would separate us from Him. Hence the Saviour says, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." Luke 14:33. Whatever shall draw away the heart from God must be given up. Mammon is the idol of many. The love of money, the desire for wealth, is the golden chain that binds them to Satan. Reputation and worldly honor are worshiped by another class. The life of selfish ease and freedom from responsibility is the idol of others. But these slavish bands must be broken. We cannot be half the Lord's and half the world's. We are not God's children unless we are such entirely.

32. In our day what is the best way we can actually help the poor? Is a handout the best we can do?
33. Review what happened in the early church right after Pentecost. Could we ever, or should we ever, return to that experience? Might the latter rain include some of that?

© 2006 Kenneth Hart M. D. ***Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know.***

Info@theox.org

Last modified: December 22, 2006

C:\My Documents\WP\SSSTG-Hart\Ecclesiastes\SS-Eccl-6-2007-02-10.wpd

Materialism is buying things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people who don't matter.

Money is an excellent servant, but a horrible master.

All this wheeling and dealing around, why, it isn't for money, it's for fun. Money's just the way we keep score.