

How You Are to Enjoy Riches

Ecclesiastes 6:1-6; James 1:17

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Those who pursue the things in this world (whether fame, fortune, family, or fun), as the source of their happiness, often think that the hardest part is simply getting and holding the things that they want. And so all effort is expended in HOW to get what one wants, and once one has it, HOW to keep it.

As we shall see from our text today, it is not quite that simple, as both the Scripture and the experience of countless multitudes will attest. For it is one thing to obtain what you want. It is another thing to enjoy what you have obtained. What good does it do to gain the whole world and then to sadly confess on your death bed that you did not find a lasting joy, peace, or satisfaction in all that you gained? And WHY was there no lasting joy, peace, or satisfaction? Because you did not know HOW to enjoy all that you have in this life.

Dear ones, it is not only necessary for those who are millionaires to hear this message from the Holy Spirit (through the pen of King Solomon); it is necessary for all of you to know HOW to enjoy what the Lord gives you (whether you have little or much). In the final analysis, it is not really HOW much you have of this earth's possessions that matters, but rather HOW do you enjoy what you have of this earth's possessions. That is what really matters.

What does Solomon say is necessary in order for you to enjoy the outward blessings of this life? You need to understand and practice these three truths from our text: (1) The Lord Gives Riches and Honor (Ecclesiastes 6:1-2a); (2) The Lord Gives the Power to Enjoy Riches and Honor (Ecclesiastes 6:2b); (3) The Soul Must Be Filled with Good to Enjoy Riches and Honor (Ecclesiastes 6:3-6).

I. The Lord Gives Riches and Honor (Ecclesiastes 6:1-2a).

A. There is a common thread in Ecclesiastes 6 that ties together what was begun in the last section of Ecclesiastes 5: Outward riches in this world. In the last section of Ecclesiastes 5, you'll recall that the Holy Spirit clarified three foundational truths about how you are to view riches: (1) Money, in itself, cannot satisfy your soul; (2) Money can and has often been used to the great harm of people; however (3) Money is a gift of God given to you for your enjoyment, as long as the Lord Himself is your first love and your chief joy. In this section of Ecclesiastes 6, the emphasis shifts from one question to another: From HOW are you to view riches? To HOW are you to enjoy riches?

B. Solomon begins by stating (as he often does) that what he now presents is not an observation he has learned from a book or from a story that someone told him, but is an observation he has learned from his own experience ("I have seen" Ecclesiastes 6:1). Solomon is not an ivory tower philosopher who writes only for the scholars of this world. Solomon comes as the Preacher teaching a philosophy of life that is faithful to the Word of God, and a philosophy of life that has been tested in the crucible of life's severest trials and of life's most abundant blessings. Solomon also notes in Ecclesiastes 6:1 that what he observed was viewed as an evil or tragedy from the perspective of the worldly person (whose heart is set upon the things of this world). What Solomon has observed is common to those whose life and reason for living is all wrapped up in this world. This is not an exceptional person that Solomon unfolds before us, but one that is very common. In fact, you may even see yourselves (to greater or lesser degrees) in this person.

C. Solomon begins to describe this person whose heart is set upon the things of this world. Here is

one that has “riches, wealth, and honor.” He has more than enough to find happiness, if happiness is found in “riches, wealth, and honor”: “A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanted nothing for his soul of all that he desireth” (Ecclesiastes 6:2a). So this person’s problem is not that he/she does not have enough to be comfortable in this world. This person has more than just the necessities of life—this person has the comforts of life in abundance as well. For those of you who think that if only you had all that you desire you would be happy, Solomon presents such a person as a case study. Here is a person who has money, who has the applause of others, who has all the comforts that this world has to offer. But he/she does not find happiness in all the comforts of this life. Something is missing. What is missing?

D. The first thing missing is this: He does not understand or act as though God is the One who has given to him his riches, wealth, and honor. Either he has never known that God is the source of all his blessings, or he does know it, but has forgotten or denied (in the way that he lives) the Lord as the Giver of all his blessings. Dear ones, the first truth to know and to practice in your life if you would enjoy the blessings of this life is this: God has given to you everything that you have. He is the Giver of all (not some), but all good gifts (James 1:17).

1. Dear ones, God is the Giver of every good and perfect gift. Whether it is a gift in its initial stage (the raw material), or whether it is a gift in its completed stage (the finished product), it is God’s gift to you. Do not rob Him of His glory. If you do, you will never enjoy the blessedness of that gift. For the gift cannot be fully enjoyed apart from enjoying the true Giver of that gift. James (in James 1:17) and Solomon (in Ecclesiastes 6:2) are teaching the same truth: Give credit to whom credit is due—God.

a. People at times may even grant to God some role in giving to them the talent or the opportunity to gain riches and honor, but are quick to add that it was their own ingenuity, creativity, hard work, and perseverance that completed what God initially gave to them. God gave me the raw material, but I developed it and brought it to such a place as to be honored for it. Dear ones, it may be true that you have had to work hard to get to where you are in life and to gain what you have accomplished in life. Perhaps what you have was not handed to you on a silver platter. So what? Do you believe that the hard work, the diligence, the wise decisions, or the steadfast perseverance are any less the gifts of God to you? If you do, you are just as guilty of robbing God of His glory (which uniquely belongs to Him) as the thief that breaks into your house and robs you of your computer, television, and jewelry (because of his ingenuity).

b. From start to finish, are you thankful to the Lord for everything you have? I’m not talking here about a mere outward thankfulness to God. Thankfulness must begin inwardly in the soul, where your hearts are broken before the Lord at the bounty of His blessings to you, where your hearts weep over how gracious the Lord is to you who are so undeserving of the least blessing in this life. Thankfulness begins with recognizing your own wretchedness before God, your own corruption, and the condemnation you deserve due to your sin against a holy and good God. Then and only then can you enjoy and appreciate even the crumb that falls from the table of God’s providence or the sip of water that cools the thirst on a hot day. Dear ones, if thankfulness does not begin there, you will not be thankful to the Lord, you will rather act as though what you have is simply what you deserve or simply what you have worked so hard to get. The end result will be that you will not enjoy anything you have, because you are looking for joy in some perishable object in this world, rather than in the Giver of every good and perfect gift. You cannot truly enjoy the gift if you do not enjoy the Giver. God will not allow you to do so as you shall soon see.

2. Let me also briefly point out here that God not only gives every good and perfect gift to those who trust Him, love Him, and obey Him, but also gives every good and perfect gift to those who forget Him, ignore Him, reject Him, and even hate Him. The Lord is kind and merciful to all (whether to the godly or to the ungodly), as we see in Luke 6:35-36. In fact, it is on the basis of God’s undeserved kindness in providing the things of this life (even to the ungodly) that the Lord appeals to them to repent of their sin and to come in

faith to Him (Romans 2:4). Remember that James did not say that “some” good and perfect gifts come from heaven above. To the contrary, he says that “every good and perfect” comes from heaven above. This indeed has the effect of aggravating the sin of those who harden their hearts against the Lord in not giving glory to Him for the many kind and good gifts they have received from God. Those who continue in unbelief and rebellion, in refusing to give God the credit for all His good gifts, will not only suffer misery here upon the earth, but will suffer misery forever in hell. When the many good gifts that people have received here upon the earth are taken from them at death, they will finally receive what they justly deserve for their many sins and transgressions against a holy and good God: everlasting torment. Receive the Gift of all gifts that is offered to you in the gospel today: the Lord Jesus Christ and His justifying righteousness. Every good and perfect gift you receive here upon the earth pales in comparison to your Savior who gives forgiveness, righteousness, joy, peace, and everlasting life.

II. The Lord Gives the Power to Enjoy Riches and Honor (Ecclesiastes 6:2b).

A. Solomon now moves to consider another point in answering the question, How are you to enjoy the outward blessings of this life? Not only must you understand and practice in your life the truth that the Lord gives you riches and honor, but you must also understand and practice in your life the truth that the Lord likewise grants to you the power, the ability, the circumstances, and the opportunities to enjoy the blessings of this life. For one may have all of the wealth in the world, but if he does not have the power from God to enjoy it, he will only aggravate the misery he has in this world. He will only see all that he has, but will not be able to enjoy it. He will see his wealth. He will handle his wealth. He will spend his wealth. But he will not be able to enjoy His wealth.

1. In some circumstances, Solomon says that a “stranger” (Ecclesiastes 6:2b), through stealth or force, eats all that this man has acquired. Whether the inability of this man to enjoy his riches is due to something outside himself (his poor health, his bad marriage, his wicked lifestyle, or a stranger) or whether the inability of this man to enjoy his riches is due to something within himself (his unbelief and rebellion against God), Solomon states that it is God that gives the power to enjoy the blessings of this life. It is not the blessing itself that conveys the power to enjoy it; it is God that conveys the power to enjoy it.

2. You see, dear ones, it is one thing for a covetous person who does not have wealth to love it, to crave it, to dream about it, and to work day and night to obtain it, regardless of the sacrifices that must be made. That covetous person may be greatly disappointed in never getting what he/she wanted. However, how much greater the disappointment and misery of one who has gained so much of what he/she wanted, but does not have the power from God to enjoy it. Here we see not only does the Lord give to you all that you have, but He also give to you the ability and grace to enjoy what you have. And without that grace given to you by God, all that you have will only add to your disappointment in this life.

B. Solomon says that from the vantage point of one who is worldly-minded and lives under the sun, this is vanity and emptiness. It is as though this man can eat of all the delicacies that this world has to offer, but he has no taste buds to enjoy them. Such wealth is for nothing. It would be better not to have that wealth, than to have it and not be able to enjoy it. Thus, to the worldly man that is in view here, this is an “evil disease” (according to Ecclesiastes 6:2b). It is a sore plague to hope for joy in riches and to find no enjoyment in riches.

1. Dear ones, never forget that it is not simply having a husband or wife that brings joy. It is not simply having children that bring joy. It is not simply having good health that brings joy. It is not simply having a good job that brings joy. It is not simply having a beautiful home that brings joy. It is not simply having an abundance of money that brings joy. It is not simply having a degree after your name that brings joy. It is not simply having the respect of others that brings joy. You will be seeking and not finding, if you think

that is the case. You will be eating but not tasting, if you think that is the case. You will be seeing but not embracing, if you think that is the case. It is God alone who gives the power to enjoy the blessings of this life.

2. If the power or grace to enjoy the blessings of this life comes from God (as surely as the blessing itself), why are you not daily looking to Him to give you that power and grace to enjoy the blessings of this life? Why are you looking to the earthly blessing to give you joy? Why are you worshipping the earthly blessing as if it had the power of itself to grant joy? Misery and futility will only come from acting as though all you have to do is to possess the earthly blessing in order to enjoy it. No! No! No! Solomon says in effect, the pathway to enjoying the blessings of this life is to know and live out in your life that God gives you every blessing to enjoy and that God alone gives you the power to enjoy every blessing. Without that power from God to enjoy the blessings of this life, it will be like having legs, but not being able to walk, or like having arms but not being able to move them, or like having ears but not being able to hear out of them. Having these blessings will not in and of itself bring joy apart from the power and grace of God to enjoy them.

III. The Soul Must Be Filled with Good to Enjoy Riches and Honor (Ecclesiastes 6:3-6).

A. Finally, we come to the third response in answering the question, How are you to enjoy the outward blessings of God? The soul must be filled with good in order to enjoy the outward blessings that God gives to you. In this section, the futility of this man (who has it all, but cannot enjoy it) is compared to a child that dies in the womb and never lives to see the light of day.

1. Solomon now adds to the blessings of this man and supposes that he has a hundred children with whom to spend his life (Ecclesiastes 6:3). He is not all alone, but has a large family with whom to spend his life. Yes, I know it is hard for many to believe that having many children (the number 100 is used figuratively for many children) would be viewed as a blessing, when in this present age children are viewed as being a curse rather than a blessing, as being an interruption to your dreams rather than being a part of your dreams, as being a hindrance to your self-fulfillment rather than promoting your self-fulfillment, as being a dishonor rather than an honor to you.

2. Furthermore, Solomon even supposes this man to live many years according to Ecclesiastes 6:3. In fact, Solomon again uses figurative language when he supposes this man to live two thousand years (as we see in Ecclesiastes 6:6). What more could one have asked for in order to find joy in this life than riches, a large family, and a long life? From the perspective of the worldly-minded person, whose life consists of only living under the sun, one could not hope to have much more than that. And yet without the power to enjoy what he has, he is worse off as to the vanity and futility that he experiences than the child that dies in the womb (according to Ecclesiastes 6:3).

B. Solomon describes the circumstances of the child that dies in the womb (Ecclesiastes 6:4-5).

1. The child that dies in the womb “cometh in vanity”, because he does not reach the point of a live birth.

2. The child that dies in the womb “departeth in darkness”, because he dies in obscurity.

3. The child that dies in the womb, “his name shall be covered with darkness”, because no one will know him in this life.

4. The child that dies in the womb “hath not seen the sun” or experienced any other earthly delight, because the darkness of the mother’s womb is his final resting place.

5. The child that dies in the womb hath not “known any thing” in the outside world by way of learning or experience or by way of trial or blessing, because his earthly existence is limited to what he experienced in the small room of his mother’s womb. Some may want to imply from this description that a child in the womb does not have the ability to think at all, and therefore does not exist as a human being. But that is not the point that Solomon is making here at all. The point simply is that a child in the womb does not

have knowledge of the outside world. The fact that a child can be filled with the Holy Spirit (as was John the Baptist according to Luke 1:15 and can leap for joy according to Luke 1:41) is certainly one that exists, lives, and can be saved by God's grace even while in the mother's womb.

6. But Solomon says this child that dies in his mother's womb is even better off than the man that is rich, has many children, and lives a long life. Why? Because the child has more rest and peace than this man, who has the blessings of this life but cannot enjoy them. The child has rest while the man has continual restlessness over his inability to find a lasting joy and happiness. Furthermore, the man, who has riches, a large family, and a long life, ends up at the same place as the child that dies in the womb: death. There are no advantages that his wealth, family, or life offer him over the child that dies in the womb, if he cannot enjoy what he has. In fact, as Solomon says, he is worse off.

C. The third and final truth that Solomon presents as necessary to enjoy the blessings of this life is that the soul of a man must be filled with good in order for him to enjoy the good all around him ("and his soul be not filled with good" Ecclesiastes 6:3). If one would enjoy the blessings of this life and see good in this life, he must know that God is the Giver of all good gifts that he has; he must know that God alone gives the power to enjoy all of the good gifts that he has; and finally he must receive the good gift of Christ into his soul. Without your soul being changed by the grace of God, so that the good work of the Spirit leads you to embrace by faith alone the Lord Jesus Christ, you will never have the power to enjoy the many good gifts from the Lord. Until Jesus Christ is your chief joy, your first love, and your reason for living, all the things in this world will never satisfy.

1. When you as Christians stray from Christ, how often you have likewise known the removal of the power to enjoy the blessings of this life. Do you wonder, Where has the joy of the Lord gone? Do you ask yourself, Why do I not enjoy the many blessings that I have in this life? I ask you, Have you forgotten WHO is the giver of all these blessings and poured out your heart in thankfulness for His undeserved mercy? I ask you, Have you forgotten that the blessings of this life cannot bring joy all by themselves? I ask you, Have you forgotten that it is God who gives the power to enjoy the blessings of this life? I ask you, Have you forgotten that the good gift of Christ in your soul (as your chief joy and first love) is absolutely necessary to see and to enjoy the blessings of this life? The reason this rich man did not see any good in this life (in Ecclesiastes 6:6) is because his soul was not filled with good—the imputed righteousness of Christ and God's goodness (Ecclesiastes 6:3).

2. Where is that which is supremely good for the soul to be found? It is found in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is GOOD, and let your soul delight itself in fatness" (Isaiah 55:2). Listen to the invitation of the Lord who urges you to come unto Him for that which is supremely good for your soul. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1).

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