

ECCLESIASTES 5:10-12

THE FUTILITY OF WEALTH

“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 laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.”¹

Materialism is the guiding doctrine for contemporary life. Materialism, whether implicitly or explicitly, has become the *summum bonum* of life. This philosophy is summed up by the tongue-in-cheek saying, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” The corollary is seldom stated, but it is necessary if we are to have an accurate understanding of the matter—“He is dead, nevertheless.” Materialism, the acquisition of things, is a tacit admission that one who has adopted this philosophy is committed to living for this world. Focused on the moment and the acquisition of things, we are hard-pressed to be overly concerned about the world to come.

The Master directed disciples to value those aspects of life which are truly important while holding the things associated with this dying world quite loosely. Remember His teaching. “I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” [LUKE 12:22-34].

Jesus challenged anyone who would follow Him concerning their focus when He taught, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” [MATTHEW 6:19-21].

James must surely have heard his half-brother make this or a similar statement at some point, for he pens a pointed warning when he writes, “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days” [JAMES 5:1-3].

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved

“The Moneylender and His Wife” is a famous painting by the Renaissance artist Quentin Metsys. The painting, once owned by Rubens, is today on display in the Louvre in Paris. Metsys’ painting confronts the one viewing the painting with the choice between God and money that each individual must make. In the painting, the moneylender is seated in his office at home, a measuring scale with pearls, jewels and gold coins in front of him on the table; he is carefully assessing the value of a single coin.

As we look at the painting, our eye is involuntarily drawn to the woman sitting next to him, the moneylender’s wife. She has been leafing through a devotional book, the book presumably purchased for her by her wealthy husband. She appears to be having her devotions, except she is distracted by all the money being counted. As she turns the page, her gaze is captivated by the coin in her husband’s hand.

The painting presents a moralising statement condemning avarice and extolling honesty. When he painted the picture in 1514, Metsys’ adopted city of Antwerp had become a world center for business and commerce, controlling trade between northern and southern Europe. However, Metsys saw how easily wealth can pull our souls away from the worship of God.

All of us feel this tension. Christians know that Christ demands our highest allegiance. We confess that nothing is more precious than the message of His Gospel—the forgiveness of our sins and the free gift of eternal life through faith in Christ the Lord. Yet, we are easily distracted by the baubles of this world. Sometimes we would rather thumb through a mail-order catalog than listen to what God has said in his Word.²

I recognise that some will rightly question whether I’m speaking as an expert, directing people to do as I do. I confess that I struggle against the constant pressure to surrender to materialism just as you do. I am not immune to the siren call to possess—no individual is immune. This is the reason we are warned against greed, avarice, coveting. We are susceptible; and we will stumble into the devil’s snare if we are not wary. Therefore, I present this message with the prayer for God’s people to be equipped with complete knowledge of His will.

LOVING MONEY — “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.” Affluenza is a term that has gained traction in the past several years. A portmanteau of “affluence” and “influenza,” the word appears to have entered the lexicon in 1954 as a criticism of consumerism.³ It became somewhat common after publication of the book, “Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic.”⁴ Affluenza is described as “a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more.”⁵ The term has become commonplace after a Texas teen, Ethan Couch, was sentenced to ten years probation after he had killed four people by driving into them at high speed. His legal defence team argued that he was unable to understand the consequences of his actions because of his financial privilege. This became known as the “Affluenza Defence.” As you might expect, people were outraged at this judgement.

² Quentin Metsys, “The Moneylender and His Wife,” Collection & Louvre Palace, <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/moneylender-and-his-wife>, accessed 1 June 2016; This illustration is suggested by Philip Graham Ryken, **Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters, Preaching the Word** (Crossway Books, Wheaton, IL 2010) 129

³ “Affluenza” (article), Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affluenza>, accessed 1 June 2016

⁴ John de Graaf, David Wann and Thomas H. Naylor, **Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic** (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Oakland, CA 2001)

⁵ Barbara O’Neill, *Affluenza: The All-Consuming Epidemic* (2nd Edition), (Book Review), <http://6aa7f5c4a9901a3e1a1682793cd11f5a6b732d29.gripelements.com/pdf/11-br-affluenza-volume-19-issue-1.pdf>, accessed 1 June 2016

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One reason people are outraged by this particular outcome is that we intuitively realise that to some extent we are all infected with this dreadful malady. The appetite for what money can buy is never satisfied; and we live in a society that teaches us from childhood that we can have what we want immediately. All that is required is six easy payments of \$19.99 each plus shipping and handling. The terrible truth is that the more we accumulate, the more we want. Solomon was assuredly correct when he wrote:

“Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied,
and never satisfied are the eyes of man.”

[PROVERBS 27:20]

Our desires run ahead of our needs. Our great need is to pause and learn to be content with what God provides. That is easy enough to say, but how do we do this? We are engaged in a struggle that will continue throughout life. One day we are in agreement with the Beatles, “I don’t care too much for money.”⁶ Shortly after, we are singing a different tune:

“Money don’t get everything it’s true
What it don’t get I can’t use.
Now gimme me money (that’s what I want).”⁷

The Baptist’s message to those coming for baptism must surely have appeared stern and uncompromising. I find it interesting that he addressed the matter of contentment even before Jesus had been revealed to Israel. “The crowds asked him, ‘What then shall we do?’ And he answered them, ‘Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.’” Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages” [LUKE 3:10-14]. Apparently, ours is not the first culture to struggle with balancing wants and desires.

Learning contentment is a constant theme in the New Testament. Consider one instance when Jesus spoke of this matter. The Master sent the Apostles on a mission that would take them throughout Judea. Eugene Peterson has performed yeoman service to the people of God by translating the New Testament into contemporary language. His translation informs us that as they were preparing to go, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t begin by traveling to some far-off place to convert unbelievers. And don’t try to be dramatic by tackling some public enemy. Go to the lost, confused people right here in the neighborhood. Tell them that the kingdom is here. Bring health to the sick. Raise the dead. Touch the untouchables. Kick out the demons. You have been treated generously, so live generously.

“Don’t think you have to put on a fund-raising campaign before you start. You don’t need a lot of equipment. You are the equipment, and all you need to keep that going is three meals a day. Travel light.

“When you enter a town or village, don’t insist on staying in a luxury inn. Get a modest place with some modest people, and be content there until you leave [MATTHEW 10:5-11].”⁸

⁶ John Lennon and Paul McCartney, “Can’t Buy Me Love,” © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

⁷ Gordy Berry, Jr. and William Robinson, Jr., “Money (That’s What I Want),” © Sony/ATV Music Publishing LLC

⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2005)

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Paul speaks quite pointedly of contentment when he writes in the Letter to the Philippian Christians, “I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need” [PHILIPPIANS 4:10-12].

Consider one final New Testament passage that speaks directly to contemporary culture. The Letter to Hebrew Christians says, “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” [HEBREWS 13:5]. Surely it is obvious that the Word of God is instructing us to eschew the acquisition of “things,” learning to value what is truly valuable.

Our text is not the only example of a time when Solomon addressed mankind’s lack of satisfaction. In the opening verses of this particular book, he has written.

“All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
their eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.”

[ECCLESIASTES 1:8]

After writing this, Solomon would describe a pathetic figure whom too many of us will recognise. As I read the following passage aloud, don’t look around; don’t allow yourself to imagine the passage applies primarily to others. Rather, pause, and consider that Solomon is speaking of us—we are the ones whom Solomon describes. Tragically, we recognise the individual Solomon describes in ourselves. “I saw vanity under the sun: one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, ‘For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?’ This also is vanity and an unhappy business” [ECCLESIASTES 4:7, 8].

“For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” Good question! Ultimately, we spend an entire lifetime accumulating, and the question must be asked, “For whom?” For some, a sense of insecurity drives us to work. We aren’t really certain that God will provide as He has promised. For others, it is an issue of wanting to provide an easier life for our family. Why? Is there not value in overcoming the challenges that come into each life through struggle? And yet, there remains the dark condition described in the text of someone who loves money. Their desire can never be satisfied; they will die unfulfilled.

Dr. Criswell used as an illustration the story drawn from the days of his attendance at Southern Seminary. He told of a pig farmer who worked continually in order to get more money so he could buy more pigs so he could get more money so he could buy more pigs. His life was consisted of one continuous effort to get more money.

His wife asked for money to buy some gingham in order to make herself a new dress. That farmer told her they didn’t have enough money for her to buy gingham for a dress. It was during the days of the Great Depression, so she made a dress from flour sacks that were brought into their home. She was deprived of her needs because her husband wanted more money.

In time, that wife died and was buried in the cemetery of the little country church. That farmer was grief stricken; but no one really knew how devastated he was until one day neighbours found him in the church yard in front of his wife’s grave.

He was stretched out on her grave, and bolts of brightly coloured gingham were draped around her tombstone and strewn across the ground. Those who found him said he was sobbing uncontrollably and saying, “See, honey, I brought you gingham. Here is gingham for you.” Tragically, that farmer was not dissimilar from so many of us today. Too late he learned that making money is not the greatest thing in the world. Too late he learned that he had traded love for the mad pursuit of silver.

Perhaps it is time that we each learned the reality of Paul’s admonition to Timothy. “Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 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 6:6-10].

What is evident, and tacitly acknowledged by rational individuals, is that the mindless pursuit of “more” is futile. We know this to be true, and yet culture urges us on in this senseless effort. Like seafarers cast adrift after a disaster at sea, the castaways are surrounded by water. Yet, in their thirst, if they drink the water on which they are floating their thirst will only increase. The more they drink, the more they will be driven mad by a growing thirst that cannot be quenched. So it is that materialism can only create a greater desire for more.

A NEGLECTED DANGER — “When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?” This is another of those sayings that are recognised as true, even if we seldom take it to heart. The greater our wealth, the more we acquire, the greater the investment of time and effort to maintain that wealth.

Solomon was well qualified to speak as he does in this eleventh verse. We are informed that “Solomon’s provisions for one day were 150 bushels of fine flour and 300 bushels of meal, 10 fattened oxen, 20 range oxen, and 100 sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and pen-fed poultry” [1 KINGS 4:22, 23].⁹ Truly, “When goods increase(d), they increased(d) who [ate] them.”

As wealth increases, those who live off our wealth also increases. Consider carefully what I am saying. At one level, as wealth increases, the more we are forced to shelter what is earned from government seizure. As earnings grow we spend more of our precious time filling out paperwork because we have to justify what we don’t “entrust” to the government. The situation forces us to spend more of our wealth hiring accountants and lawyers who advise us how to avoid paying more taxes than is necessary. Simultaneously, government bureaucrats and elected politicians are confident that they are better equipped than are those who create the wealth to spend the moneys earned. So, people who do nothing to produce wealth feel justified in taking more of our wealth in order to inflate their own importance. Solomon was correct, “When goods increase, they increase who eat them.”

At an even more basic level, the greater our wealth the greater the need to maintain appearances. As a business grows the owners are compelled to hire others to keep the business growing—investors expect a return on what they have invested. Those benefitting from our wealth are those who don’t own it. The difference between the rich man and those who labour for him is his gratification at looking on his wealth and saying, “This is mine!” Is this difference really worth it? Can we really say that the anxiety and care is worth being able to say, “Mine?” The answer lies in an imponderable—do we possess our goods, or do our goods possess us.

⁹ **The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville 2009)

Beyond governmental seizure and the requirement for a greater outlay to pay those who assist in protecting wealth, there is always the problem of spongers, freeloaders and hangars-on who seek to live off what others have earned. We don't speak of this often, perhaps feeling that it is wrong to acknowledge that there are many people in society who want to live off the largess of others. Whenever we read of an individual winning the lottery, there will shortly appear a story in the news media of the nuisance experienced because of people seeking a portion of the winnings. Some even go so far as to file legal claims arising from nothing more than sheer imagination. Multiple charitable groups, some legitimate and some of questionable repute, seek a portion of those moneys. Winners are often inundated with pitiful stories of need asking for moneys. Perhaps most distressing to these winners are the "friends" who expect a share of the winnings! Solomon was correct, "When goods increase, they increase who eat them."

In contemporary society, we equate wealth with honour; and as honour grows, responsibility to others grow. In reality, there exists no strict corollary between wealth and honour. Nevertheless, the greater one's holdings, the greater that one's responsibilities. Perhaps you have seen the ad for an automobile company that was frequently played this past winter.¹⁰ The lad eagerly accepts the keys to his dad's new car. The following scenes show him dropping his dad off at work as his dad reminds the boy to pick him up at six-thirty. The poor lad is next stuck in traffic during a rain storm, and he had washed the car! Then, he rushes to avoid a parking ticket because he failed to feed the meter. Then, as he is carrying groceries to the car, the bottom tears out of the bag spilling the contents onto the ground. Next, we see him trying to get some money from the ATM as a car behind him honks for him to hurry up. One last time he is stuck in traffic. Finally, he responds to his dad, "You know, Dad, I'm good," before peddling off again. Position and holdings impose responsibility.

Isaiah presents a strange prophecy concerning an individual promoted to a position of authority and wealth. God warns a man named Shebna, who is steward of the king's household. The steward was a very important position that would have had great honour attached to it. God declares that shortly He will violently demote Shebna, replacing him with a man named Eliakim [see **ISAIAH 22:15-21**]. What follows in this particular prophecy is especially surprising!

"I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open. And I will fasten him like a peg in a secure place, and he will become a throne of honor to his father's house. And they will hang on him the whole honor of his father's house, the offspring and issue, every small vessel, from the cups to all the flagons. In that day, declares the LORD of hosts, the peg that was fastened in a secure place will give way, and it will be cut down and fall, and the load that was on it will be cut off, for the LORD has spoken" [**ISAIAH 22:22-25**].

Eliakim is pictured as a peg driven securely into the wall. Then, warning to the theme, Isaiah writes that the weight of honour of his father's house will be placed on him, together with all the members of his family who seek to get just a little of the honour. Isaiah speaks even of placing on him the weight of the entire kitchen, until at last he pulls free of the wall and crashes down. Think of that! The weight of honour, all the good things that come to Eliakim, ultimately will cause him to come crashing down. God would indeed bless Eliakim, and his family would take advantage of his position in an attempt to further their own interests, until disgrace would befall both him and them. It is a picture of Solomon's warning in this eleventh verse, "When goods increase, they increase who eat them."

¹⁰ "Funniest Subaru Commercial with 5 Year Old Driver," YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DghtxDqvPeI>, accessed 3 June 2016

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Ultimately, the only advantage of wealth is that the one who owns the goods is able to see them. The wealthy home owner can still live in but one room at a time. The fine automobile can be driven only on the same roads on which older used vehicles are driven. Wealth is precarious; it excites envy and greed in others who will attempt to take it for themselves. Thus, the only real benefit in wealth is the immediate experience of pleasure. And we have already noted that at best the pleasure is transient. Do you remember these words?

“All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
their eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.”

[ECCLESIASTES 1:8]

Though amassing wealth appears to be laudable, it is always less than it seems—it can yield only temporary and superficial enjoyment.

Solomon’s philosophy clearly states that wealth is given to be enjoyed. I don’t deny that wealthy people have a responsibility to be generous, both for the sake of their soul and to honour the Lord God who gives wealth. Nevertheless, wealth is to be enjoyed responsibly. Wealth is not solely for personal enjoyment; but enjoyment is a primary reason that God permits one to be wealthy. Solomon develops this philosophy in this book.

“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” [ECCLESIASTES 2:24]

“I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live” [ECCLESIASTES 3:12].

“I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him” [ECCLESIASTES 3:22]?

“I commend joy, for man has nothing better under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given him under the sun” [ECCLESIASTES 8:15].

There is a richness in actually possessing all things while being unencumbered by the necessity of preserving the elements that perish with use. Yet, it is difficult for us to set aside the things of this world, for they are necessary in a measure. Our nature compels us to walk in the flesh, but we are not truly of the flesh [see 2 CORINTHIANS 10:3]. We long to be free of the rules for surviving in this dying world, for the Spirit that lives in us has revealed a higher calling. Still, God made a beautiful world, and we delight in what He has made and now permits us to enjoy.

Charles Bridges notes in his commentary, “The poorest artisan in Rome, walking in Cæsar’s garden, had the same pleasures which they ministered to their lord. The birds made him as good music, the flowers gave him as sweet smiles; he there sucked as good air, and delighted in the beauty and order of the place, for the same reason, and upon the same perception as the prince himself: save only that Cæsar paid for all that pleasure vast which of money, the blood and treasure of a province, which the poor man had for nothing. ‘I have no comfort in all these things’—said one, who had made for himself a princely Elysium—‘because I meet death in every walk.’ ‘Ah! David, David’—said Dr. Johnson to Garrick, when shewing him his Twickenham Villa—‘these are what make a death-bed terrible!’”¹¹

¹¹ Charles Bridges, **An Exposition of the Book of Ecclesiastes** (Robert Carter & Brothers, New York, NY 1860), 151–152

THE BLESSING OF CONTENTMENT — “Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.” The one who has little to lose will have but little fear of losing. Sleep for such a one is the natural fruit of weariness without care. Christians are taught to hold the things of this world lightly, knowing the truth that, “Godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world” [1 TIMOTHY 6:7]. The verse following provides a great lesson for us who believe: “If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” [1 TIMOTHY 6:8].

Content with what we have, we can sleep the sleep of the righteous. Knowing that we possess all things, we rest easy. Those who fear surrendering all that they hold are restless. They find sleep flees from their eyes. This was not the case for the Apostles; and it shouldn't be the case for us. Peter's deliverance from Herod's grasp presents a significant truth for us as Christians. Herod had executed James, the brother of John. Seeing that this unjust act pleased the Jewish leaders, he then arrested Peter. It was Herod's intention to have him executed after Passover [see ACTS 12:1-5]. Then, we read the sixth verse: “When Herod was about to bring [Peter] out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains and sentries before the door were guarding him” [ACTS 12:6].

Though chained with two chains, bound to the two soldiers who stand guard in the cell and knowing that there were more sentries outside the door, the man of God rests easy. With Paul, Peter is guided by this truth, “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” [PHILIPPIANS 1:20, 21]. If he was living for the things of this earth, death would be a loss for him; if he was living for the Eternal Kingdom, death would be his gain. The same is true for us, if we are sons of God.

Affluence and indulgence has robbed us of one of God's richest gifts—the gift of rest. Professor Derek Kidner makes a telling observation on our modern lifestyle when he writes, “Whatever discomforts the labourer puts up with, [an absence of sleep] will not be one of them; and whatever burdens were laid on Adam at the Fall, there was a rough mercy in the sentence, ‘In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.’ We offer an unconscious comment on it by our modern exercise-machines and health clubs—for it is one of our human absurdities to pour out money and effort just to undo the damage of money and ease.”¹² Touché! Ouch! A veritable truth that strikes modern society where we are most vulnerable. Surely, the couplet attributed to Oliver Goldsmith is applicable at this point:

Ill fares the land, to hast'ning ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.¹³

Sleepless nights are connected with anxious days. Worry over what must be done tomorrow, concerns over how to preserve what we have and diets that are overly rich ensure that we will not sleep. Worrying how to attain more of the goods of this dying world ensures not only that we surrender God's gift of rest, but it will surely lead us astray, for it remains true that “the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that many have wandered away from the Faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” [1 TIMOTHY 6:10].

¹² Derek Kidner, **The Message of Ecclesiastes, The Bible Speaks Today** (InterVarsity, Downers Grove, IL 1976) p. 56

¹³ Oliver Goldsmith, **The Deserted Village**, in **The Poetical Works of Oliver Goldsmith: with a Life** (Blakeman & Mason, New York 1862) 35

Have you noted how frequently we hear of celebrities who die as result of an overdose of sleeping pills or because they sought relief through increasing dosages of narcotics? Famous actresses and actors, musicians or entertainers frequently die in the prime of life because of overdoses—whether intentional or accidental. Their fame is their downfall; however, such causes of death are rare among the labouring class.

An ancient commentator has wisely remarked, “He is rich—not who possesses much, but who desires little.”¹⁴ If our treasure is Christ the Lord, surely our soul is satisfied! If the Living God is truly treasured, surely our soul is sated. It is as we long for more of the meaningless things that this world supplies that we jettison true treasures and grow restless.

This is the teaching Jesus presented through a parable that addressed the administration of what has been entrusted to us? Jesus taught, “There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions. And he called him and said to him, ‘What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.’ And the manager said to himself, ‘What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do, so that when I am removed from management, people may receive me into their houses.’ So, summoning his master’s debtors one by one, he said to the first, ‘How much do you owe my master?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ He said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’ The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are shrewder in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

“One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another’s, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for 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 God and money” [LUKE 16:1-13].

Let each Christian learn to possess what God has entrusted to him or to her. Let each of us guard our heart so that our possessions do not possess us. If we will do this, we must invest time in the presence of Him who is our true treasure—Christ Jesus the Lord. If we will do this, we must confess our avarice, our yearning to possess more. We must ask Him to free us to enjoy what He freely gives to all. This likely will begin with each of us seeking forgiveness for our pursuit of things and asking that He will assert His will to reorder our lives. He alone is able to ensure that we live balanced lives that use what He entrusts to us for His glory and not for our own pleasure alone. May He be glorified in us. Amen.

¹⁴ John Brentius, cited in Charles Bridges, op. cit., 153