

Rich People, Poor People



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 3

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Ecclesiastes 5.

MEMORY VERSE: “Anyone who loves money never has enough. Anyone who loves wealth is never satisfied with what he gets. That doesn’t [does not] have any meaning either” (Ecclesiastes 5:10, NlrV).

LEO TOLSTOY, A RUSSIAN WRITER, WROTE A SHORT STORY CALLED “HOW MUCH LAND DOES A MAN NEED?” It was about a poor man named Pahom. Pahom said, “If I had plenty of land, I should not fear the devil himself.” Pahom then heard about the Bahkirs, a group of people who sold land cheaply. Pahom went to them. They offered him land at “a thousand rubles [dollars] a day.” The Bahkirs told him: “We sell land by the day. As much land as you can go around on your feet in a day is yours. There is only one condition. If you did not return on the same day to the spot where you started, your money will be lost.” Pahom started walking and walking and walking. . . . He was getting so much land! He kept going, all day, only to realize that he had better get back before the day ended. But he had gone too far. He had to rush, or he would lose his money! He hurried and hurried. But he dropped dead just before he got to where he started.

Pahom’s servants dug a grave and buried him. How much land does a man need? “His grave was all the land he needed,” wrote Tolstoy.

This week, we will look a little more at what Solomon says about wealth and poverty.¹

¹poverty—poorness; the quality of being poor.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 4**GOD IN HEAVEN; PEOPLE ON EARTH (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7)**

Summarize the basic message of Ecclesiastes 5:1-7.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon focuses on useful living and advice on spiritual matters with the presence of God in mind. In Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 Solomon shows how God is real and close to us. God cares how you come to Him. God cares how you talk to Him. And God cares if you keep your promises to Him. Solomon's God, the God of the Bible, is not the God of deists.² So Solomon is talking about how we should relate to God.

How does Matthew 21:18-31 compare³ with Ecclesiastes 5:1-7?

The point is clear. If we tell God that we plan on doing something, we had better do it. But that is easier said than done. How often have we made promises to God, that we will stop doing something, but then failed?

How do Matthew 18:21-23, Romans 2:4, and 1 John 2:1 help us understand the hope we can have, even if we fail many times?

Have you made promises to God that you have not kept? If so, what is the only thing you can do?



**Do not be like the fig tree (Matthew 21:19).
Keep your promises.**

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 5**POOR PEOPLE (Ecclesiastes 5:8; Matthew 26:11)**

Solomon now returns to a key theme of Ecclesiastes: money, and people who have a lot and people who do not.

Read Ecclesiastes 5:8. These are strange words! After all, it was Solomon himself who set up taxes for his nation. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon noticed some of the problems the poor had under these heavy taxes.

Solomon offers no answer to these problems. All he says is, "Do not be surprised by it."

What do the following verses say about how we should treat the poor? What common theme appears in all of these verses?

²deists—people who are deists believe God created the world and then left it alone.

³compare—show how things are the same.

Exodus 23:6 _____

Leviticus 19:15 _____

Leviticus 25:39-43 _____

Deuteronomy 15:7, 11 _____

Deuteronomy 24:14, 15 _____

In Ecclesiastes 4:1, Solomon complained about oppression.⁴ We saw, too, that there were different ways people could oppress⁵ others. A common way of oppression is for rich people to oppress poor people. But God recognizes that there are poor people. So He gave strict rules on how we should treat them. All humans are equal before God. The Cross is proof of this. But it is so easy for those who have money to oppress those who do not. The Bible does not encourage such actions.

When Jesus came to this world, did He come as someone rich or poor? What does your answer say to you about how you should relate to those who are poor?

⁴oppression—pressure on people to do things against their will.

⁵oppress—to pressure people to do things against their will.



Jesus was not wealthy. When He lived at home, He worked hard for a living.

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 6

THE KING AND THE FIELD (Ecclesiastes 5:9)

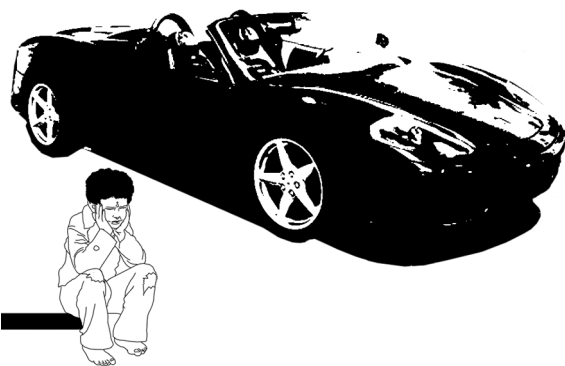
What message should everyone receive from Ecclesiastes 5:9? Also read Deuteronomy 10:14; Psalm 8:6; Psalm 24:1; Psalm 115:16.

There is one thing we all have that is the same: We all live on this planet. We all breathe its air, drink its water, eat the food that grows out of its ground. Some people might have cleaner air, purer water, better food. But in the end, we are all equally dependent upon what God has given to us.

But this has not stopped the injustices we see in the world today, just as Solomon saw them in his day.

What would Solomon say about a world in which people can spend almost \$13,000 a night for a room at a hotel in Paris while millions of other people are homeless?

What would Solomon say about a world in which people can spend \$370,000 on a Ferrari while others do not even have shoes?



What would Solomon say about an auction a few years ago during which someone paid \$85,000 for a bottle of 1735 wine while billions of people do not even have fresh drinking water?

Solomon would be shocked. God has given more than enough of everything for humans here. The causes of poverty are many. There is no doubt that greed and selfishness are two reasons why there is poverty.

Those who have made themselves rich by oppressing the poor will find themselves face to face with an angry God.

⁶principle—a basic rule.

⁷parable—a story that teaches a lesson.

What principle⁶ is in James 5:1-5 that we could use in how we treat others? Whether rich or poor, ask yourself, What could this verse be saying to you?

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 7

NEVER ENOUGH (Ecclesiastes 5:10)

A poster once read, “Money does not make you happy, but it sure makes unhappiness a lot more comfortable.”

Most people would agree. But Ecclesiastes shows that money and wealth do not solve all our problems. They do not guarantee happiness. And they do not come without problems of their own.

What point is Ecclesiastes 5:10 making? How can we use this point in other situations? Also read Proverbs 27:20; Isaiah 56:11, 12.

Any desire, feeling, or ambition that is not under God’s control is never easily satisfied, no matter how much of it we have. Drug addicts are a good example of this problem. Before long, the amount of drug a person needed before is not enough. He or she keeps needing more and more. This works with a lot of other things, including money.

What is the point of the parable⁷ in Luke 12:13-21?

The key to understanding this parable is found at the end of verse 21. Jesus is warning about people who are not “rich toward God.” Jesus does not explain this, but He seems to be warning about people who are mostly interested in adding up riches, rather than accepting one’s responsibility to God. Jesus said in Luke 12:48 that to whom much is given “much [is] required.” In the same way, someone who has riches has a responsibility to use them wisely. Often, people who are very rich are the most selfish, while people who are poor are willing to share the little they have.



Are you rich with worldly goods, but poor in the things of God?

What are your attitudes⁸ toward money? Are you more interested in being rich, rather than in being “rich toward God”? If so, how can you change? Why must you change?

⁸attitudes—how a person thinks and feels toward God, other people, or things.

⁹generation—all the people born about the same time. Your parents belong to one generation. You belong to the next generation.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 8

NAKED IN THE DUST (Ecclesiastes 5:15)

Ecclesiastes has challenged Bible students for many hundreds of years. But there is one message that comes with a very good point. This message is in Ecclesiastes 5:15. Solomon is talking about some of the foolishness and challenges of wealth. For example, one may gain much money only to lose it all before it can be passed on to the next generation⁹ (Ecclesiastes 5:14).

In the original Hebrew, Ecclesiastes 5:15 reads: “He came forth from his mother’s womb. But he will go again naked as he came. He will not carry in his hand anything of his work when he does go.”—Adapted.

The point is clear: The rich die along with the rest of us. In death, all their money becomes useless. But, the message is bigger than that. Solomon’s whole point in the book is “Look at your life. What are you living for? Life is not important if it is filled with nothing.” So what are the important things we should be focusing on?

What is Jesus saying to us in Matthew 16:24-26?

What shall someone give for his or her soul? Money, fame, power, desires, love? These things may be important. Often, they are gifts from God (Ecclesiastes 5:18). But they also can be the

devil's tool to trap our souls. In this life, things are as temporary as we are. When we die, that is it! The next thing we know is eternity.¹⁰ It is either “the kingdom prepared for [us] since the world was created” (Matthew 25:34, NIV) or “sob [cry] and grind your teeth” (Luke 13:28, NIV) and everlasting¹¹ destruction (2 Thessalonians 1:9). What temporary earthly things will be worth it when “you see those who are in God’s kingdom. You will see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets there. But you yourselves will be thrown out” (Luke 13:28, NIV)?

What are the cords (ropes) that Satan uses to tie you to this world? What things do you find very tempting? What Bible promises can you claim to keep your soul from sin and from giving up on yourself?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 9

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ecclesiastes 5 again. Focus on the parts we did not get to discuss this week.

About the rich man in Luke 12:13-21, Ellen White wrote, “The situation of the poor, the orphan, the widow, the suffering, the afflicted, was brought to this rich man’s attention. . . . But this man’s aims were no higher than the aims of the beasts that die. He lived as if there were no God, no heaven, no future life. He lived as if everything he had were his own. He lived as if

he owed nothing to God or man.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 256–258.

“In giving ourselves to God, we must give up all that would separate us from Him. The Savior says, ‘In the same way, you must give up everything you have. If you don’t [do not] you can’t [cannot] be my disciple.’ Luke 14:33, NIV. Whatever makes the heart forget God must be given up. Mammon [money] is the idol of many. The love of money, the desire for wealth, is the golden chain that ties people to Satan. Reputation¹² and worldly honor are worshiped by another group. The life of selfish comfort and freedom from responsibility is the idol of others. But these idols must be broken. We cannot be half God’s and half the world’s. We are not God’s children if we are not fully His.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 44.



We cannot be half God’s and half the world’s.

¹⁰eternity—life without end; forever.

¹¹everlasting—lasting forever; eternal; without beginning or end.

¹²reputation—what people think about you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ In your own society, how do the rich make the poor suffer? How can we, as a church, help the poor in these situations?

❷ In what ways might some of you, even as Christians, be oppressing¹³ the poor?

❸ Money remains one of the great challenges for Christians. How can we claim to be “strangers and pilgrims [wanderers] on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13) while building up riches here? At the same time, we have to live. We have to pay the bills. We have to feed ourselves. This all takes money. How much money is enough? As a class, discuss the challenges we face with this difficult subject.

¹³oppressing—pressuring people to do things against their will.