

Goal: The hearers would receive and give, living in the generous kingdom of God.

King Solomon, who penned the book of Ecclesiastes, knew a lot about wealth. He was one of the wealthiest people who ever lived. One historian estimated that between the taxes he levied on his own people, the tributes that were paid by the nations around him, and the gifts he received, Solomon had an annual income of 25 tons of gold, or in today's dollars, just over \$3.8 billion. That's more than Mark Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs, and Bill Gates ever made in a year, combined. So, Solomon knew a lot about wealth.

But with all that wealth, Solomon wasn't happy. In fact, the longer he was king of Israel, the wealthier he got, and the more unhappy he grew. The more money he had, the less content he became with what he had, always wanting more. The more money he had, the less sleep he got worrying about it. The more money he had, the more people he watched eating up his wealth, taking advantage of him, living off of his wealth. And then he realized that all his wealth was temporary. *"You can't take it with you." ("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." (Ecclesiastes 5: 10 – 13)*

We can learn a lot from Solomon's wisdom here. However, in the thousands of years since Solomon's time, it seems like we haven't. Money still remains one of the main focuses of most people and the root of so many problems today.

Jesus also talked a lot about wealth and money. Actually, he talked more about money and wealth than He did about any other topic, including love. Of the 38 parables Jesus taught, 16 dealt with money and wealth, which means He knew how people struggle with them.

Today, money continues to be an obsession. People continue to think if they just had a little more money, they'd be happier. If they just had a little more money, they'd have fewer problems. If they just had a little more money, life would be better. As a result, the economy is usually one of the most influential factors in our elections and wealth is usually the topic of political debates. Money also is one of the most-cited causes of divorce. And then there are arguments over taxes, the minimum wage, the constitutional amendment, funding rail and public schools, and income equality. Not to mention how many of us max out our credit cards and have you noticed the number of bankruptcies cited in the news each month.

Solomon was right, MONEY IS A CONSUMER. It consumes the attention and the life of those who have it and worry about it. It consumes those who don't have it but still chase after it and

are jealous of those who do. And we can find such creative ways to justify how money consumes our lives. We rationalize our focus on money as being good and necessary for ourselves, and others. But it's not just money. It's true of every false god, every idol we give power.

Money is a big one, but it's not the only one. False gods consume. They consume our time, they consume our happiness, they consume our marriages, they consume our lives. False gods take. They take people away from each other and pit them against one another. False gods demand. They demand more and more and more. They are never content with just part of you, they want all of you. And they will hound you to the grave. So, if you're worried, if you're unhappy, if you're afraid, if you're anxious, if you're jealous, if you're angry, if you're impatient, or if you're anything like that, here's why, YOU'RE BEING CONSUMED BY A FALSE GOD.

The true God, doesn't consume, take, or demand, He gives. He gives life, He gives peace, He gives faith, He gives. He gives work to enjoy, He gives people to love, and He gives contentment in doing so. He gives patience in the midst of trouble, He gives forgiveness for our sins, and He gives the promise of a life that will never end. A life free from sin and trouble and which will last forever. And to provide all of that, He gave the greatest gift of all, His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus came to give. He gave health to the sick, He gave hope to the hopeless, He gave kindness to the outcast, He gave good news to the poor, and He gave life to the dead. Then, ultimately, He gave His own life too, on the altar of the cross. There He died for our sins and then on Easter He rose from the dead. He rose from the dead so that He would give us the promise that we would rise too. The true God is not one who takes and asks from us, He is one Who gives and gives abundantly.

That's what Solomon grew to understand. He wrote, ***“Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot. Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.” (Ecclesiastes 5: 18 – 20)*** When you're being consumed, whenever you're feeling hard-pressed like something or someone is wanting something from you, whatever or whoever it is, it's time to repent. It's time to turn away from that false god that is only trying to consume you, and simply receive again from our giving God. He only wants to give.

The true God is a generous and giving God who only wants to give us His love and forgiveness through the people He has given to us, to lead us. They're not the enemy. They're

not against us. They're the ones God has given us to bless us. At home, at work, at school, at church. When we're divided, Satan is simply using these false gods to rob us of the gifts God wants to give. Satan wants from us and Satan takes from us and Satan often uses God's good gifts to deprive us, to guilt us, to consume us, to cause all kinds pain in our lives and to try to make us feel that we don't have enough. Satan's goal to to make us concerned about only one thing, me and mine. Repentance is giving up me and mine, and receiving His. His forgiveness, His life, His love.

And God's well will never run dry, He will never close His hand toward you. Just consider that image of a closed hand. A closed hand can't receive anything. A closed hand won't give anything. A closed hand is only concerned about itself. An open hand, however, is ready to receive and welcome and embrace and thank. But an open hand can also give. It can give to others for it is open to others and not just itself. Think about that image when you see someone in need on the side of the street or when you encounter someone who has experienced a great loss or when you come to Saint Mark to realize that God is not here to take from you but to give.

The more you give up the more you will receive. You cannot out give God! That's what Jesus teaches us in His response to Peter who said, "***See, we have left everything and followed you.***" ***Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life."*** (Mark 10: 27 – 30)

With persecutions, because Satan isn't going to leave you alone. If he can't consume you from within, with false gods, he will try to consume you from without, with persecutions that will attempt to wear you out and feel that you have nothing else. Satan is ruthless.

But your heavenly Father is ruthless, too. He is ruthless for you. And so is Jesus. He wants to give everything to you with all that He has. And so is His Spirit. He chose you in baptism and made you His own, giving you His kingdom, forever.

Solomon finally realized that God's kingdom was so much better and richer than the one God had given him here. Solomon finally understood that all of the things He had in this world were merely gifts from the Heavenly Father. Gifts to be received, enjoyed, and shared, so that He might point everyone else to the joy and riches that are beyond compare. That's the way our giving God works, both then and now. He cares for widows and orphans, He welcomes the unloved. He raises the low, He fills the hungry, and, in His kingdom, He makes the first last, and the last first. ("***But many who are first will be last, and the last first.***" (Mark 10: 31) Amen.