

## Proper 24B – Christ gives us true Prosperity

1. Anyone who has a passing familiarity with the Star Trek franchise is probably familiar with the Vulcan greeting – Live long and prosper. (Must be on a Sci-Fi kick because we referenced Star Wars last week)
  - a. As far as greetings go, you can't find one more universally pleasing than that.
    - i. Who wouldn't want to live long and prosper—to live a long time and succeed in life?
    - ii. Sounds pretty good! Of course, as is often the case, the trick is defining terms. We can debate what constitutes a long life.
    - iii. But today, God's Word invites us to consider the last word in that famous greeting. What does the prosperous life look like?
  - b. This is the question that consumed King Solomon's attention in Ecclesiastes.
    - i. In this book, we have the observations of a man who was given access to almost unlimited wisdom, wealth, pleasure, and power.
    - ii. He took for himself seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines.
    - iii. He built houses and cities, bought horses and chariots, amassed staggering amounts of money, and imported exotic goods from distant lands
    - iv. And yet, when we come to the end of his life, the likely time when he wrote Ecclesiastes, we find a man who has found that it was all, "**Vanity of vanities . . . all is vanity**" (Eccl 1:2). A chasing after the wind.
  - c. Today we hear Solomon's indictment of the way that so many people live their lives, especially in our country: the idea that prosperity is measured by wealth and possessions.
    - i. Every year, Americans spend billions of dollars playing the lottery, hoping to "hit it big," but we know that many of the "lucky" ones go on to lose their wealth or find life even more miserable with money.
    - ii. Countless individuals and families struggle under crushing debt because they've lived far beyond their means, trying to buy their way to happiness.
    - iii. Even those who enjoy financial stability often know the frustration of having homes so filled with stuff that we have to rent additional space just to store what we're not using.
    - iv. In the corporate world, stakeholders are tempted to prioritize profit over all other outcomes as the greatest good, and workers often are seen as expendable if layoffs will balance the books.
2. By our own experience we often discover what Solomon observed almost three thousand years ago: Those who love money will never have enough.
  - a. Solomon writes, "**He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity**" (v 10).

- i. For a person whose goal in life is simply to become rich, when is enough truly enough?
    - ii. And as Solomon notes with an increase of wealth also comes an increase of those who want a share, **“When goods increase, they increase who eat them, and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?”** (Ecc 5:11)
    - iii. At first, it might be exciting that people are attracted to me. Are they here for me, or for what I can give them?
  - b. Furthermore, our stuff can be held to our harm, **“There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt”** (v 13).
    - i. On one hand, that harm can come from the outside, from those who desire to steal and defraud.
    - ii. But even greater harm can arise from within, from our twisted human hearts, which are constantly looking for something to provide good apart from God.
    - iii. Unfortunately, it’s a tragedy that many of us have seen, as the love of money turns people not only from trusting in God but also from loving others well.
    - iv. How many families have seen siblings turn against one another when parents pass away and inheritance comes into view?
  - c. And let’s not forget that the riches in which we trust can be fleeting.
    - i. Solomon recounts the sad story of seeing a man lose his wealth through a bad business venture and have nothing with which to care for his son (v 14).
    - ii. And there are countless examples of people whose wealth has been wiped out due to a medical catastrophe, market crash, real estate bubble...
3. Solomon clearly makes the case that chasing after wealth is not the path to *true* prosperity.
- a. And what he says in these verses as well as the rest of Ecclesiastes exposes a deceptive lie: that prosperity and the good life are found in self-sufficiency, in independence. (how un-American!)
    - i. At some level, we all are tempted to believe that if we just gathered more, worked a bit harder, gained more knowledge or partied with the right people, we could make our lives better.
    - ii. And then when reality sets in it crushes our illusion of independence and reminds us of our smallness.
    - iii. God uses those times to re-orient us to our true callings in the home, at work or school, in our communities.

- iv. These are what Solomon calls the “lot” that God gives, **“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.”** (Ecc 5:18)
- b. But for the child of God, this is not be bad news!
  - i. Because God is not only calling us to acknowledge our smallness but also to know his greatness.
  - ii. He calls us to stop pursuing prosperity in our own way, and instead trust that he has done everything to guarantee our prosperity today, tomorrow, and forever in giving us Jesus.
  - iii. That news has the power to give us joy in a way that a pile of dollar bills never could.
- c. Jesus calls you by name to find true prosperity in his grace alone.
  - i. As Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 8, **“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich”** (2 Cor 8:9).
  - ii. Look to Jesus and see the richest expression of love demonstrated in the extreme poverty of death on a cross, so that we sinners, rich in things and poor in soul, might know true prosperity in belonging to him.
  - iii. That our eyes would not be transfixed by the temporary things of this world but fixed on our, **“inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept for you in heaven.”** (1Pe 1:4)
- d. And rejoice! Rejoice in the simple pleasures of life, your lot in life for as Paul says, **“godliness with contentment is great gain...”** (1Ti 6:6).
  - i. Contentment is one of the traits that comes to believers when we place our faith and trust in Jesus as Paul says in Php, **“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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”** (Php 4:11-13)
  - ii. We are able to rejoice in the daily blessings of food and drink and work.
  - iii. And rejoice in the opportunities God gives you to bless others with the wealth he has entrusted to your management.
  - iv. Rejoice in the life that God has given – rich or poor, great or small because in Jesus, we discover what prosperity really looks like - we discover a God Who is committed to giving us true prosperity in contentment with what He has given us in this world and even more in what awaits us through Christ!