

# Rich Man, Poor Man



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ecclesiastes 5.*

**Memory Text:** “He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity” (*Ecclesiastes 5:10*).

Leo Tolstoy wrote a short story called “How Much Land Does a Man Need?” It was about a peasant, Pahom, who swore, “If I had plenty of land, I shouldn’t fear the devil himself.” Pahom then heard about the Bahkirs, people who sold land cheaply. He traveled there and was offered land at “a thousand rubles a day.” What did that mean? They told him: “We sell it by the day. As much land as you can go around on your feet in a day is yours.” Only one condition: If you didn’t return on the same day to the spot you started, the money would be lost. Pahom, delighted, 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. He had gone too far. He had to rush, or else all was lost! He hurried and hurried, only to collapse dead within sight of the starting spot.

His servants dug a grave and buried him. How much land does a man need?

“Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed,” wrote Tolstoy.

This week we’ll look a little more at what Solomon has to say about wealth and poverty. He said a lot; we’ll cover what we can.

*\*Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 10.*

## God in Heaven, Humanity on Earth

**Read** Ecclesiastes 5:1-7. Though you might not understand every phrase, summarize the basic message:

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However much Solomon in Ecclesiastes, as in Proverbs, focused on practical living and moral injunction, he did so always with an awareness of the reality and presence of God. Here, too, in these lines, Solomon expresses not only the reality of God but the closeness of God; that is, God cares how you approach Him, God cares how you talk to Him, and God cares about you paying your vows to Him. Solomon's God, the God of the Bible, isn't the God of deists, some distant deity who created the world and then left it to its own devices. If so, we would truly have reason to despair.

In this context, Solomon is talking about how we as humans should relate to God.

**Read** Matthew 21:28-31. How does this text fit in with the message of Solomon here?

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The point, of course, is obvious: If we tell the Lord that we plan on doing something, we'd better do it. However, that's easier said than done. How often have we made vows to God, promising and swearing oaths that we will stop doing this or that or that we will always do such and such, only to fail? Sure, we might have meant it at the time, and really tried, but we failed either way. What's our situation then?

**How** do Matthew 18:21-23, Romans 2:4, and 1 John 2:1 help us understand the hope that we can have despite failures?

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**Have you made promises to God that you haven't kept? If so, what's the only thing you can do?**

## Poor Man

“For ye have the poor always with you” (*Matt. 26:11*).

Solomon now returns to a key theme of this whole book: money and those who have a lot and those who don't.

**Read** *Ecclesiastes 5:8*. Kind of strange words, if you think about it. After all, it was Solomon himself or, at least, his government who set up taxation for his nation. At least in *Ecclesiastes* Solomon noticed some of the problems the poor had under this oppressive bureaucracy.

**What** are some of the problems people often encounter when working through a typical bureaucratic system? Solomon offers no solution to the problem; all he says is don't be surprised by it.

**Look** up the following texts; note what each one says about how the poor should be treated. What common theme appears in all of these texts?

*Exod. 23:6*

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*Lev. 19:15*

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*Lev. 25:39-43*

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*Deut. 15:7, 11*

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*Deut. 24:14, 15*

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Earlier in the book (*Eccles. 4:1*), Solomon bemoaned the oppression he had seen under the sun. We saw, too, that there were different ways people could oppress others. A common one, known all through history, has been the oppression of the poor by the rich. The few texts above, and there are others, show how the Lord, while acknowledging the existence of the poor, gave strict rules on how they were to be treated. All human beings are equal before God—the Cross more than proves that; the sad fact, however, is that it's so easy for those who have money to wield abusive power over those who don't. Such actions, of course, are condemned in the Word.

**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 poorer, at least in finances, than you are? What is your attitude toward them?**

## The King and the Field

“Moreover the profit of the land is for all; the king himself is served from the field” (*Eccles. 5:9, NKJV*).

**Read** the above text. What is it saying? What message should everyone, especially the rich and the powerful, take from it? See also *Deut. 10:14, Pss. 8:6, 24:1, 115:16*.

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Rich or poor, powerful or oppressed, there’s one thing we all have in common: We all live on this planet. We all breathe its air, drink its water, and eat the food that grows out of its ground. Some might get cleaner air, purer water, better food, but in the end we’re all equally dependent upon what God has provided for us.

That realization, however, hasn’t stopped the gross inequities we see in this 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 others the world over are homeless?

What would he say about a world in which people can spend \$370,000 on a Ferrari while others don’t even have shoes?

What would he say about an auction a few years ago in Canada during which someone paid \$85,000 for a bottle of 1735 wine from Germany while billions of people don’t even have regular access to fresh drinking water?

He would be appalled, for sure. The Lord has provided more than enough of everything for human beings here. Though the causes of poverty are complex, there’s no doubt that greed, corruption, and covetousness have made it a lot worse.

No question, those who have made themselves rich through the exploitation of the poor will find themselves face to face with an angry God.

**Read James 5:1-8. Though the obvious message is clear, what principle is being expressed that could apply to each of us in how we treat others? Whether rich or poor, ask yourself, What could this text be saying to me?**

## Never Enough

A poster once read, “Money doesn’t make you happy, but it sure makes misery a lot more comfortable.”

Most would agree. But as the book of Ecclesiastes shows, money and wealth don’t solve all our problems, don’t guarantee happiness, and don’t come without problems of their own.

**Read Ecclesiastes 5:10.** What point is being made? What principle is seen there that applies to more than just money? *See also Prov. 27:20; Isa. 56:11, 12.*

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Any desire, passion, or even ambition that isn’t under the control of the Lord is never easily satisfied, no matter how greatly indulged. This problem is seen especially among drug addicts. Before long, the amount of drugs they had before isn’t enough; they keep needing more and more. It can work with a lot of other things, as well, including money.

**Read Luke 12:13-21.** What’s the point of this parable? Is Jesus talking against wealth per se, or is something else going on? If so, what?

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Perhaps the key to understanding this parable is found at the end of verse 21, when Jesus warns about those who are not “rich toward God.” Though He doesn’t explain here, Jesus seems to be warning about those whose life is swept up in the pursuit of riches at the expense of everything else, including one’s obligations to God. As Jesus said elsewhere, to whom much is given “much [is] required” (*Luke 12:48*), and someone who has wealth has a responsibility to use it wisely. Oftentimes, though, those who have the most are the greediest, while those with the least are willing to share the little they have.

**Take an honest look at yourself: What are your attitudes toward money? If you are more interested in being rich as opposed to being “rich toward God,” how can you change? Why *must* you change?**

## Naked in the Dust

However much Ecclesiastes has challenged Bible students over the centuries, if there is one message that comes through, perhaps it could be found in Ecclesiastes 5:15. He’s talking about some of the foibles and challenges of wealth, such as gaining money only to lose it all before it can be passed on to the next generation (*Eccles. 5:14*).

Ecclesiastes 5:15 in the original Hebrew reads like this: “As he came forth from his mother’s womb, naked he will go again as he came, and he will not carry in his hand anything of his work when he does go.”

The point is obvious. The rich die along with the rest of us, and in death all their money becomes meaningless. Yet, the message is bigger than that. Solomon’s whole point in the book is that, Hey, look at your life—what are you living for? What matters in an existence that’s filled with *hebel*? What, then, are the important things that we should be focusing on?

**Read** Matthew 16:24-26. What is Jesus saying to us in these few verses?

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What shall someone give for his or her own soul? Money, fame, power, passion, even love? While these things can have their place, and are even gifts from God (*Eccles. 5:18*), they also can be the devil’s tool to ensnare our souls. Whatever we have in this life, it’s only as temporary and transient as we are. When we die, that’s it, at least as far as we are concerned here. The next thing we know is eternity: either “the kingdom prepared for [us] from the foundation of the world” (*Matt. 25:34*) or “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (*Luke 13:28*) and everlasting destruction (*2 Thess. 1:9*). What earthly things, as temporal and fleeting as we are, will be worth it when “ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out” (*Luke 13:28*)?

**What are the cords that Satan uses to bind you to this world? What things do you find very tempting, hard to resist? What Bible promises can you claim in order to keep your soul from sin, from despair, and from giving up on yourself?**

**Further Study:** Go back over Ecclesiastes 5 and read it again a few times, focusing on the parts of the chapter that we didn't get to discuss this week.

In the context of 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. . . . This man's aims were no higher than those of the beasts that perish. He lived as if there were no God, no heaven, no future life; as if everything he possessed were his own, and he owed nothing to God or man."—Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 256–258.

"In giving ourselves to God, we must necessarily give up all that would separate us from Him. Hence the Saviour says, 'Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.' Luke 14:33. Whatever shall draw away the heart from God must be given up. Mammon is the idol of many. The love of money, the desire for wealth, is the golden chain that binds them to Satan. Reputation and worldly honor are worshiped by another class. The life of selfish ease and freedom from responsibility is the idol of others. But these slavish bands must be broken. We cannot be half the Lord's and half the world's. We are not God's children unless we are such entirely." —Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 44.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- 1** In your own society, what ways are the poor oppressed by the rich? In what ways can we, as a church, help the poor in those situations?
- 2** In what ways might some of you, even as Christians, be oppressing the poor?
- 3** Solomon spends a lot of time talking about wealth because money, and the pursuit of money, remains one of the great challenges for Christians. How can we profess to be "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (*Heb. 11:13*), while hoarding up treasure here? At the same time, we have to live, we have to pay the bills, we have to feed ourselves, and this all takes money. How much is enough—or, indeed, is there ever enough? As a class, discuss the challenges we face with this difficult subject.

# More Than Language

by KIM, SUNG AE

When my daughters, Tina and Kay, were in elementary school, I looked for an English language school to supplement the classes they take in school. I chose the Adventist Institute of English because of its high standards of academics.

After seeing how well the girls were doing in the language school, I enrolled them in the Adventist school, which had the same reputation for quality education. The girls thrived in their new school, where the staff encouraged cooperative learning rather than the stiff competition that most schools encouraged.

Tina and Kay studied religion in their new school, and they often asked me questions about God. “Why don’t we attend church?” Kay asked me one day. I made excuses, because I knew that my work required me to do things that were at odds with Christianity. But Tina’s questions about God were more direct and troubling. Finally I told the girls if they wanted to go to church, they could go.

Tina and Kay began attending the Adventist church. They signed up for Bible studies with the pastor. The pastor visited our home and invited us to attend Bible studies too. I went twice, but the girls continued studying. In time they were baptized. My husband often attended school and church functions when the girls invited him. But I resisted.

Then I was injured in a climbing accident and could not work. With time on my hands, I decided to enroll in English classes at the Adventist language school. I began attending the weekend activities, including Bible classes on Sabbath. At first my husband did not want to attend, but the entire family was attending worship and taking Bible studies. I rejoiced to see the changes that Christ was bringing to our home. We are growing in faith together and now use the Bible as our standard of faith.

When Tina finished her classes at the Adventist elementary school, she enrolled in a public high school. Now she must attend classes on Sabbath, and this has affected her faith. When we realized the difficulties Tina faces in school, we decided that Kay must study in Adventist schools, where she can continue growing in Christ.

I still study English at the Adventist language school and love to invite my friends to study and worship there too.

Mission offerings help fund the Adventist English Language schools throughout Korea, which are a major evangelistic outreach in my country. Thank you for helping my family find Christ through language studies.

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*KIM, SUNG AE and her family live in Seoul, Korea.*



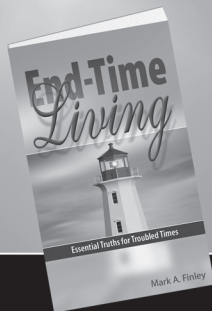
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# Finding Jesus in the City

How does one introduce Christ to people too busy to care? Show God's face to those who don't know where to look? Plant a church in a city where most churches stand nearly empty?

Geneva, Switzerland, is one of the most secular cities in the world. Its historic churches stand empty while people pass by pursuing their futures. A group of dedicated young people at the Adventist seminary in Collonges, France, have set their sites on Geneva. Their challenge is to find ways to present the gospel that is relevant and appealing to the unchurched in Geneva.

And it's working. The young people are creating new and deeply meaningful encounters with God, brushing away 2000 years of dusty tradition. At one meeting, some 60 people, mostly college-age students and many university students in Geneva, gathered for a meal and an encounter with Christ. These young people are searching for God, for meaning, and the Adventist youth are helping them find it.

I want to help these young people, hold up their spiritual hands, support their efforts to build a vibrant, living group of believers in this great city of Europe. I can do that through my mission offerings and especially through my Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, part of which will help plant this church. For me it's personal.



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