

Resilient Series - Consumerism & the Church
Ryan Patty / 12.20.2020 / Ecclesiastes 5:10-12

Good Morning Christ Community! Thankful to be able to open God's Word with you this morning. If you have a bible, go ahead and turn to the book of Ecclesiastes. For those of you who are new my name is Ryan and I am one of the pastors here. Over the past three weeks we have taken a break from walking through a book of the Bible and are in a short series called Resilient that is challenging us to look at the competing worldviews that seek to overthrow our Christian and Biblical worldview. These worldviews can be either overt or subtle, yet each of them in their own way try to goads us into forsaking God, His Word, or even His community.

And so we need to be aware of what is happening and what we as Christians are both called to do and think in light of these competing worldviews. We are seeking to do as Paul said in 2 Cor. 10 and "demolish arguments and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ." That is the goal of this series and what we are trying to inform and instruct us in collectively. So this week, we turn our hearts and our minds to the subject of consumerism. Yes, I said that right. I am tasked with preaching on the subject of consumerism during the week in which most of us struggle with it a lot and none of us wants to talk about it!

So real quick let me give you three reasons why you're all plagued by consumeristic hearts and minds and why you never see a U-haul behind a hearse. I'm kidding, that's not helpful nor does it offer us much hope. And we need hope during these days. And we need right thinking and right living. Biblical thinking and biblical living.

Because if we are being completely honest, consumerism is so much of the air we breathe in the western world that sometimes we don't even recognize it for what it is. So what is it?

- **Consumerism**, in part, **is a never-ending desire to possess material goods and to achieve personal success.** Others have described it as (**Consumerism is**) **having rather than being.** In other words your worth, whether it be your satisfaction in life, your own self-esteem, or even your identity, is measured by what you have instead of who you are. It tempts us to find our worth and satisfaction in something other than God. God made us as consumers and placed us in the Garden to cultivate and grow and yes **consume** for enjoyment. This was a

good thing. But then with the Fall our consumerist tendencies have changed. We believed that subtle lie from Satan, “surely you won’t die if you just take..” yet the taking now knows no bounds. Fast forward to our busy culture that seeks to consume everything and nothing has changed since the Fall. Life is now about what we have and own as we seek to always find fulfilment in something, and the result of this is that we end up drowning out Jesus’ anchoring promise to us in Matt. 28 - “and behold I am with you always.” We get distracted from that truth and seek to find something else to be with us always. And that’s the sad part about it all. In the definition I gave I said consumerism is the never ending desire to possess material goods and to achieve personal success. Possessing material goods in and of itself is not a bad thing. Personal success in and of itself is good. But now that all consuming desire has taken over and it is the end all be all of our society.

And so it really is the very air we breathe. If you talk with many missionaries, who either grew up somewhere else or are returning on a sabbatical, they definitely recognize it. They recognize the incessant advertising to look thinner, stronger, or more beautiful. The commercials to buy this or that in order to make your life easier or more enjoyable; and we are giving in. As of 2017 Americans collectively now owe more than 1 Trillion dollars in credit card debt. and so we are bombarded. “Take this, join that club, buy this, spend on that” all for the sake of finding joy and purpose and satisfaction. Because that’s the lie that consumerism, and really any worldview, wants to promise you, THIS is the ticket, THIS is the item, THIS is how you should think about X,Y, and Z. THIS is how you find meaning and happiness.

- Like the drug addict who needs just one more hit for pleasure so we just need one more thing, one more piece of clothing, one more gadget, one more of something to feel content. Until a few weeks or months or years later when our new thing is an old thing and the same old cycle starts over again. It’s a temptation for all of us in various ways, and at the very least we need to be aware of how it has infiltrated our society and sadly many of our churches. But praise God we do have hope! You see the beauty of the Gospel is that your worth and satisfaction are found in Christ alone. And this frees you to recognize that your delight in God only grows as you come to understand that God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in Him. And when you are seeking to do as Colossians 3 says and “set your minds on the things above, not that which is on earth,” then my friends you have a very strong foundation in which you resist the pulls and temptations and the

trappings of consumerism. The Gospel of Jesus Christ has something to say about every area of your life... including how and why you consume things.

So as I said, we will be primarily in the book of Ecclesiastes this morning. Chapter five. As I have mentioned before this is my favorite OT book, I'm weird like that, but I do believe that god's wisdom speaks to us through the ages. His Word is timeless. And because there, in many senses, is truly nothing new under the sun, I want us to see how His Word speaks to us concerning this subject of consumerism. Ecclesiastes 5:10-12 (CSB),

- 10 The one who loves silver is never satisfied with silver, and whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with income. This too is futile. 11 When good things increase, the ones who consume them multiply; what, then, is the profit to the owner, except to gaze at them with his eyes? 12 The sleep of the worker is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of the rich permits him no sleep.

Let's pray.

This morning we have a point from each verse that we need to consider about consumerism and the heart of the Christian.

1. The futility of consumerism (v.10)

“The one who loves silver is never satisfied with silver, and whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with income. This too is futile.”

- A. Your translation might replace silver with money as that is what the Hebrew word itself is getting at. The one who loves money, who is consumed by it, will find themselves never satisfied by it. This is what Solomon, or “The preacher” as he is called in the book, is telling us. He repeats the idea in the second clause of the verse (and whoever loves wealth is never satisfied), not just the love of money, but the love of amassing wealth, you will still never be satisfied with what is coming in. And then he says, this is futile.
 - a. Other translations will say this is vanity. This word is difficult to translate well but I lean towards futile, towards an enigma, that is it is frustratingly difficult to understand. And the preacher says this throughout Ecclesiastes about a variety of topics.
 - i. Topics such as life and death, money and possessions, why the evil seem to flourish and the righteous suffer, work and really all things. The wisest man here to walk the earth apart from Christ seeks to apply His God-given wisdom to the various issues we all face in life and he concludes that much of it is an enigma, it’s really difficult to understand the depths of what is happening overall. And he says this particularly about those who love money, who love amassing wealth. He says that what is characterizing that pursuit is that it’s futile. Why?
 - ii. Because those who end up getting more money, Solomon writes, are still never satisfied. The self-comparison never ends. The problem with gaining more money is that our sinful hearts always want more. The target point of contentment is always moving further down the line for you as what you have gained is not enough. The pursuit of more is endless.
 - iii. And this is important because more often than not the struggles with consumerism are grounded in a desire for more money. A love for it. Well if I just had more than I could buy this or that, if I just had more than I could keep up with the Jones’, or even in Christian circles God if I just had more than I could actually give more! (So much for the sacrificial side of giving). Even in my own sinful

thinking, “Lord, just let me just win the lottery! Do you know how many people I could bless with that?!” (This is difficult if you’ve never bought a lottery ticket).

B. So allow me to say this. The Bible has a lot to say about money, both the love of it and the snares of it. You all know the statistics. The poorest 20% of Americans are richer than the vast majority of what is considered an affluent nation (Foundation for Economic Education). Many of us are not in the poorest 20%. What this means is that we need to seriously heed the Bible’s warnings about the love of money. We need to wrestle with those and examine our motives and our passions and how consumerism has infiltrated even our own lives. We need to heed Jesus’ warnings about why it can be difficult for the rich to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

a. But hear me here, I want you to make a lot of money! The bible doesn’t say making a lot of money is sinful, it says the LOVE of money and the LOVE of making more and more money is sinful. So I truly do want you to make a lot of money, NOT for the sake of just hoarding it, but so that you can give it away! So that you can support local churches and church plants near and far, so that you can support missionaries who are going, so that you can support the work of ministries that are training up indigenous pastors and teachers, so that you can GIVE to the advancement of God’s Kingdom! I want you to truly live out and experience that it IS better to give than to receive! That Christians should truly be the most generous of all people, seeking to bless others, to give freely, to live a sacrificial life, because God in giving us Jesus Christ has so generously blessed us. That is the true blessing of having wealth.

i. In the sermon on the Mount Jesus instructs those listening that **“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”** - Matt. 6:21. Listen, it is great to financially plan and save to leave to kids and grandkids etc. But heed Jesus’ warning, don’t put your hope in that. Don’t just leave them money, leave them a legacy of faithfulness that they saw and observed from you.

C. We desire because we do not have. Which blinds us to what we do already have... Then tragically our hearts become hardened to thankfulness to God for what He has blessed us with, which leads us to desire more. In order that we Never. Stop. Wanting. More. It never ends. This is the futility of consumerism.

2. The Lie of Consumerism

“11 When good things increase, the ones who consume them multiply; what, then, is the profit to the owner, except to gaze at them with his eyes?”

- A. Common knowledge would often dictate that a good thing increasing would bring about greater joy, contentment, and happiness. When good things increase other good things should increase, right? Well this verse takes a turn the other way. This is the lie of consumerism. We want to believe that as we gain more and more money or items or prestige that the goodness of our life increases.. But that is not the case.
- i. “When good things increase, the ones who consume them multiply.” The more we make, the more we tend to spend. And for Solomon, and for us, the accumulation of goods in this day and age, whether it be land, grain, animals, or gold, or something else, signified a good thing. But Solomon turns from the good things and says when all this increases, so do those who consume them, who want them, who desire them.
 - b. He would know this better than most. The first ten chapters of the book of 1 Kings outlines just how expansive his kingdom and wealth had become. And the truth in his day was that as he became more and more rich, he had more and more mouths to feed and people to provide for and projects to fund. In other words, there is often a weight, a burden, of responsibility that those who have excess experience as they gain their wealth. They end up so consumed by other things that they cannot truly enjoy what they have.
 - c. And Solomon concludes in the second line of v. 11 by saying with all this responsibility and increase in people needing to consume, what does it ultimately profit the owner. He never truly enjoys it because he is always worrying about how to pay for this or that or provide for this person or that, and so sadly, he just “gazes at the wealth with his eyes.”
 - i. I imagine him looking out from the balcony of his palace, the most exalted king on the face of the earth at his time, over the fields and head of cattle he has, over a peaceful kingdom and many servants, and simply still worrying about tomorrow. Worrying about all that he has to do. Not enjoying the day. “What is the ultimate profit to the owner except to just gaze at it?”
 - ii. **Illustration:** During college I got to go on a “mission’s” trip to Paris, France. I say “mission’s” because there was a lot more of just a trip happening than actual mission’s work, but that’s a

conversation for another day. One of the days we got to go see the palace at Versailles which has an amazing expanse of gardens. It was truly awesome to see. And again I told you it was a trip, so don't judge me here... But our guide talked about how many kings and queens of past sought to build these lavish gardens as not only a display of wealth, but as a place to escape the stresses of the day. *They had to build something to enjoy, because nothing else would bring them enjoyment.* And I thought of that trip and all the expenses that Louis the 14th had to spend and ultimately man's search for rest and respite and meaning and peace as I read this remark from a pastor from England in the 1800's.. **"The poorest artisan in Rome, walking in Caesar's garden, had the same pleasures [himself] which ministered to his [master]. The birds made him as good of music; the flowers gave him as sweet of smiles; he there sucked as good of air, and delighted in the beauty and order of the place for the same reason and for the same perception as Caesar himself: save only that Caesar paid for all that pleasure vast sums of money, the blood and treasure of a province, which the poor man had to pay nothing for."** And we instinctively know this to be true. Doesn't matter if you drive to the view of the Tetons in a 100K Range Rover or a \$1900 Buick Lesabre with a broken front bumper, you're still beholding a magnificent view.

- iii. This serves as a warning to us. Let us heed the refrain of Ecclesiastes to enjoy laughter and the good in our numbered days; for the Christian our wealth does not affect our happiness or contentment in life. This week we celebrate the greatest joy this world can know in the birth of Jesus Christ! Let us rejoice in that. Yes, there are Christmas traditions and the busyness of the holiday routines and times with family members and times with spouses' family members that we just might have to fight to be joyful at... I'm really not trying to get in trouble here..
 - 1. But to my Christian brothers and sisters here, we of all people have a reason to rejoice. It's been a hard and frustrating year for many of us, but let's not allow our eyes to glaze over as we gaze at the miracle of Christmas. At the riches that God has blessed us with in Christ.
 - a. Ephesians 1:18 - "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints"

- b. Meditate on that glorious inheritance. We of all people don't have to buy the lie that consumerism offers. It promises a happiness and joy that is temporary at best, we have an eternal inheritance that never fades, that moth and rust cannot destroy, and that ultimately cannot be taken from us. Let us marvel at that truth this week and every week! God saved us! We all of all people, he saved us. He calls us Son and Daughter. May our eyes never gaze over this amazing truth, may our hearts never grow dull to this reality that is now ours and the riches we have in Christ. He saved us. May we rest in that inheritance in the midst of everything trying to vie for our time and attention.
- iv. Let us resist and flee from the subtle lies of consumerism, we have something and someone infinitely better.

3. The Effect of Consumerism

“12 The sleep of the worker is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of the rich permits him no sleep.”

- A. What is the effect of this consumerism that we partake in, this love of money and building wealth and having our desires and hopes set on that instead of on God, what is the lasting effect? We have no rest. Those who work hard during the day, the “worker” Solomon is calling here, really the man or woman who works unto God and finds thankfulness for what God has provided and seeks to be faithful with that they have, their sleep, their rest is sweet. They are not plagued by anxiety as it relates to what tomorrow holds, but they are able to find a sweet rest.
- a. Meanwhile, the abundance of the rich permits him no sleep. There is always something else to worry about, always something else to fix or change. Those very truths we see to be self-evident in our own culture. There is always something else to have, there is always MORE to have, and so it never ends. The cycle just goes on.
- B. So how do we apply this to our hearts. We understand consumerism is futile, it never ends in searching for something else. It’s a lie in that it promises to give us something and never delivers. And the lasting effect of it is that it brings no rest, no true peace, to your life. So how should we understand and apply these things to our lives? I would like to give you two things to leave with: a warning to the church about consumerism, and an exhortation in light of it.

A Warning for the Church

At the beginning of the sermon, we defined consumerism as the (Consumerism is a) never-ending desire to possess material goods and to achieve personal success. What this has brought about then is that if something or someone does not aid in our own determined personal success, then that thing or person is deemed not worth our time. Sadly, this has infiltrated many minds that come into a church. Jesus is now seen as something to be added to our lives to help us achieve that personal success. People and things are only valuable based on what they can do for us. God then is only valuable based on what he can do for us. The church overall is only valuable based on what it can provide for us. We determine what is valuable based on what can fit into our lives to help us in one way or another.

So in the last thirty years the rise of the seeker sensitive churches came about. Pastors can now function as spiritual baristas who offer up something that you like and always have you leaving church feeling warm and happy. Let's stay away from the reality of sin and Jesus' call to repentance, that can come across as a little harsh.. Churches, then, have adopted this mentality in seeking to cater to everyone. Let's play three songs max and not have a specific time of reading or prayer. Hymns have too much theological language, we should stay away from those. The pastor's sermon should be no longer than 20 minutes because that's the max attention span these days. The kid's ministry should probably have a merry-go round in the center of it and teach them just enough about Jesus so mom or dad don't have to talk about him (I kid you not we visited a church when I was a kid that had a merry-go-round and a two story slide. I just remember that, nothing else from what they said). The youth ministry should be fun enough that student's want to come but not too serious that they couldn't ever bring friends. Everything has to be "cool and hip and young" these days. And when all of this is taking place and done well, then we are told we have a church that now knows how to reach people. A church that people actually want to attend. A church that has satisfied the consumerist-ic tendencies of its people.

But what if God's main priority isn't our happiness or how he can fit into our lives? What if his first concern isn't for how you feel about Him? What if God cares most about His glory? His fame amongst the nations? What if God is for God? What if lives of holiness do produce happiness? What if He's not just another thing we can purchase in this world but actually the life-altering reality who calls for our faith, obedience, and love? What if your sin was so heinous in his eyes that He had to send His son to actually die in order to deal with it?

And what if the gathering of the church is primarily for the believer and not the unbeliever? What if God commands us to worship and when we have been given new hearts we actually love to do it? What if we understand God's Word to actually be *God's real words* and therefore delight in hearing it preached, and taught, and proclaimed? What if the church isn't here to meet your needs, but here to make disciples? What if the church is a body and you are called to use your God-given gifts to serve it and build it up? What if the family of God is to have the utmost importance in your life? Would that then change how we think about God and His church?

So my warning after my long diatribe is this: **beware of how consumerism can so easily infiltrate your relationship with God and your view of the church.** God exists for His glory not ours. The church exists for God's glory and satisfaction not ours. Beware of how consumerism wants you to view your relationship with God or the church. Consumerism wants to make your faith in Christ as something to be used for gain; Christianity's claim is that

we count all as loss in the world for the sake of knowing Christ and making Him known. Let us heed the warning that consumerism presents.

An Exhortation for the Church

If you would please flip forward in your Bible's to Luke chapter 12. Luke chapter 12. I want to end our look at consumerism with an exhortation from the parable of the rich fool. Luke chapter 12, starting in v. 13.

13 Someone from the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 "Friend," he said to him, "who appointed me a judge or arbitrator over you?" 15 He then told them, "Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions." 16 Then he told them a parable: "A rich man's land was very productive. 17 He thought to himself, 'What should I do, since I don't have anywhere to store my crops? 18 I will do this,' he said. 'I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods there. 19 Then I'll say to myself, "You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.'" 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared—whose will they be?'

21 "That's how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

My exhortation is simply this: **Be rich towards God.**

There is something markedly different about a Christian from the world. We have hope. We have grace. We have truth. All because of the blessings that God through Christ has poured out on us. We are called to bear fruit in many ways, but consumerism is a serious enemy to fruitfulness. We then should heed the call to be rich towards God. Resist the pull for one more thing and seek to give one more thing. Yes, He made us to consume, but all of the things the world wants us to consume will never satisfy. All our possessions will never truly fill us. Let us feast on Christ! Let us consume more and more of Him. May we awaken a more powerful hunger for Jesus and see how that is our primary defense against the idolatry of having more or being more. Our affections must be stirred up for Jesus and we must recognize that the cross has freed us from the gnawing pain of wanting more. May we believe that he cares for us immensely, will provide for all our needs, and may we be rich towards him as an act of gratefulness and thankfulness. May you have the most blessed Christmas, even in the midst of a hard year, remembering what God through Christ has done for you.

Would you pray with me?