

Sirach #2: Money and Independence

From the Wisdom of Sirach

I. Introduction

- a. The last time I preached, I shared a very practical lesson on righteous living in a few areas of our lives, based on gems from the Wisdom of Sirach:
 - i. Preparing for and overcoming temptation
 - ii. not having a “double mind”; not walking on “two paths”
 - iii. honoring our parents, and
 - iv. eating.
- b. **Wisdom of Sirach**, one of the intertestamental books (Apocrypha).
 - i. These books were included in both Catholic and Protestant Bibles up until the 1880s; then removed from the Protestant Bibles.
 - ii. Whether you understand the intertestamental books to be part of the Bible (and inspired by the Spirit of God) or not, they contain wonderful wisdom and history of God’s people.
- c. Who was Jesus ben Sirach?
 - i. Sirach was a man who studied the Law and the Prophets diligently.
 - ii. Purpose of his book:
 1. to provide wisdom and instruction
 2. that lovers of wisdom might “live a life according to the law”
 3. “those who love learning should be able to help outsiders understand both through speaking and writing.”
- d. Today’s lesson format, slightly different than our first Sirach lesson:
 - i. We will read several of Sirach’s writings on one specific topic: the unrighteous reliance on money.
 - ii. Money can really mess people up, with eternal consequences.
 - iii. Our temptations and opportunities with money also change as our life circumstances change. So, we need to keep internalizing God’s teaching on money.
 - iv. We will explore what Sirach says, as well as look at other parts of Scripture that speak about money.

v. My goals for this lesson:

1. To expose lies about money that Satan uses to trip us up and even turn us away from God. Don't want you to be ensnared.
2. Perhaps someone listening to this message is ensnared. I want to give you great motivation to get out of this bondage immediately.
3. Encourage us with examples from Scripture of those who had very little money and yet glorified God with what they had.

e. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 5:1-8**

II. God's Patience as We Grow in Personal Righteousness

- a. Before we get to the theme of money, let's hit on something Sirach says about God and how we should view God's compassion.
- b. Striving to live righteously in our ordinary, day-to-day lives is where the real battle is. Worthy of all our effort as it brings glory to God, demonstrates our love and trust in Him, and is really challenging!
 - i. Consider the topics we already covered (not being double-minded, eating, dealing with temptation). My experience: I make progress, I fall, I make some progress, I fall, etc. This can be discouraging!
 1. There is a real gem in this passage about God's character to help us.
 - ii. "Do not say 'I sinned, so what happened to me?' For the Lord is patient. Do not be so confident of atonement that you add sin to sin; and do not say, 'His compassion is great; He will atone for the multitude of my sins.'" (v. 4-6)
 1. When we sin, God is patient.
 - a. "How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus says 70 X 7! (**Matthew 18**)
 2. But, we don't take advantage of his compassion and keep sinning!
 - a. Because, it is also true that God's anger rests on sinners.
 - b. "For both mercy and wrath come from Him."
 - c. Repent! "do not delay to turn to the Lord" and "do not put it off from day to day."

- iii. Me: honoring God with what I put in my mouth and handling my money - \$50 cheeseburger story.

III. God Wants Us to Be Dependent on Him, Not Money

- a. “Do not set our heart on your possessions, and do not say, ‘I’m independent.’ Do not follow yourself and your strength so as to walk in the desires of your heart; and do not say, ‘Who will be lord over me?’ For the Lord will surely punish you.” (**Wisdom of Sirach 1:1-3**)
- b. When I say, “My niece is independent,” what do you think?
 - i. Good:
 - 1. independent thinker, financially independent, not reliant on another person, not influenced by bad company/character
 - ii. Bad:
 - 1. don’t have the benefit of other’s protection, help, friendship.
 - a. A “legal dependent” is someone who is sustained by another person, such as a child supported by his or her parents. In an insurance policy, the term legal dependent generally includes all of those people whom the insured person is under a legal duty to support, such as a spouse and minor children.
- c. God wants us to be dependent on Him! He wants to be our sustainer.
 - i. There is no situation where God wants His children to be independent of Him. This is great news!
 - ii. Do not set your heart on your possessions or dishonest wealth.
 - 1. Sirach tells us this is foolishness.
 - 2. They will profit you nothing “in the day of distress” (vs. 8) and “the Lord will surely punish you” (vs. 3)
 - 3. He says more about this in **chapter 11**.
- d. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 11:14-26**
 - i. Good, bad, life and death, poverty and wealth are all from God.
 - ii. There is a man who grows rich from “attention and restraint” and seeks to find rest and enjoy these things for himself.
 - 1. Diligence and self-control are good things. They can lead to riches.

2. But, they should not lead us to seek our independence from God.
 - a. "I am independent. From now on, what will harm me?" (vs. 22)
 - b. This person's reward? He dies and leaves his good things to others.
3. Me: Atticus coaching
 - a. I am in a non-Christian business owner's coaching group for lawyers.
 - b. There is some reward in the things we are taught: discipline, self-control, various management skills, etc. However, and not surprisingly, there is no warning about becoming independent from God (putting trust in wealth).
 - c. It is really helpful for me to be aware of the limitations of non-Christian counsel. Like Paul saying, "physical training is of some value."
4. This passage seems to me to be the material for one of Jesus' parables!

iii. Read **Luke 12:13-21**

1. We don't know why the crop yielded plentifully (perhaps the farmer was disciplined, worked hard, self-controlled, a good manager, etc.)
2. But, this man was a fool, storing up for himself.
3. He was not rich toward God.
4. Parable told as a warning to someone who wanted a fair division of an inheritance!
 - a. "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses."
5. Warning, about relying on money rather than God.
 - a. "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." **Colossians 3:5**
 - b. Covetousness = idolatry, worshipping a different God; independence from the Creator of heaven and earth.

6. Jesus: beware! Don't get faked out. Better to lose the inheritance than being led astray from the Father!

iv. **Wisdom of Sirach 11**

1. Easy for God to bless a poor man (**vs. 19-20**)
2. This blessing (or punishment) comes at death, based on our works. (**vs. 24-26**)
3. It reminds me of two more parables Jesus told:
 - a. **Matthew 25** – the parable of the sheep and the goats
 - i. Two groups of people, one using wealth for God's purposes, the other is not.
 - ii. Consider the day-to-day lives of each group: one living for others, the other living for themselves.
 - iii. At the judgment, there is a very different consequence: one group rewarded, the other punished.
 - b. **Luke 16:29-31** – the parable of the rich man and Lazarus
 - i. Consider the lives of the rich man and Lazarus. One is living in luxury, one in great affliction.
 - ii. It was easy for God to flip the tables at their deaths. Now, they were spending eternity in new states.
 - iii. As Sirach says: it was easy for God to instantly bless Lazarus (complete turn-around of his circumstances):
 1. He probably did not remember his bad things.
 2. The rich man likely did not remember his good things.
 - c. These are warnings and encouragements to us!

v. Riches will not profit us at death – it's the wrong type of currency

1. Money can certainly buy you much in this life (great medical care, good food, visit beautiful places, hire someone to clean your house, fix your house so it is comfortable, etc.)

2. But it does not get you far in the next life!
 - a. Monopoly money example. Can only use it in the game. No use if you want to buy a car or food at the grocery store.
 - b. For more about the proper use of our money, see lesson entitled *On Money*, by David Adams, May 23, 2021, found at www.walking-by-faith.org.
- e. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 41:1-4**
 - i. Don't fear the judgment of death. We are all going to die, whether you live 10, 100, or 1000 years!
 - ii. God is good. He made death. It is His "good pleasure" that we die. We are simply passing to the next stage of glory and true riches – if we are prepared on that Great Judgement Day.
 - iii. Death is bitter to the man who is "at peace with his possessions... without distractions, and prosperous in everything."
 - iv. Death is good to one who is distracted by his suffering.
- f. The root of living independently from God: arrogance
 - i. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 10:7-18**
 - ii. God hates arrogance. Why?
 1. "The beginning of a man's arrogance is to depart from the Lord, for his heart withdraws from the One who created him."
 2. God wants our hearts, our love, a relationship with us.
 - iii. How can he who is earth and ashes be arrogant?
 1. Even while you are living, your insides are decaying!
 2. Even a king will die.
 3. We will inherit reptiles, wild animals and worms.
 - a. (And, those in Christ will be resurrected, with new bodies! See **1 Corinthians 15!**)
 - iv. Read **Ezekiel 28:1-19**
 1. Early Christians saw the king of Tyre as referring to a fallen demon assigned to that city, or Satan himself.
 2. This king was lifted up in arrogance in his power. Sought independence from God. Wanted to be God.

3. This is complete folly. This will not end well. (**Revelation 20**)
4. Let's be aware of Satan's schemes around our desire to be independent of God, and how temptations around money can play into this.

IV. Examples from Scripture for Us

a. Solomon

- i. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 47:12-21**
- ii. Began as a great example. Read **3 Kingdoms 3:4-13 / 1 Kings 3:4-13**.
 1. Solomon's great humility, seeking wisdom over riches.
 2. How wise he was in his youth.
- iii. Ended as a bad example.
 1. "You collected gold like tin and multiplied silver like lead. But you lay down beside women and were enslaved by your body."
 2. **Deuteronomy 17** tells the ruler not to do several things:
 - a. Don't multiply a cavalry
 - b. Do not return to Egypt
 - c. Don't multiply wives
 - d. Do not multiply silver and gold
 3. Solomon does three of the four and is led astray.
 4. It seems to me that Solomon's heart became independent of God because of his reliance on wealth and power. He is ultimately led astray to worship false gods by his foreign wives. (Read about this in **1 Kings**)
 5. WARNING FOR US: Solomon's wisdom did not save him. Two appearances from God (in a dream and after he builds the temple) did not save him. His arrogance led him into sin and utter disaster for Israel.

b. Elisha and Gehazi

- i. **4 Kingdoms 4-5 (2 Kings 4-5)**
 1. Elisha was very poor.

- a. Relies on the Shunammite woman and her husband for food and lodging (performs the miracles of her having a son and then later raising that son from the dead).
 - b. Eats plants with his fellow prophets – including some poisonous ones (resulting in the miracle of healing).
 - c. Only has 20 loaves to feed 100 men (resulting in the loaves being multiplied to feed everyone).
 - 2. After healing Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, of leprosy, Elisha rejects receiving Naaman’s gift of silver and expensive clothing.
 - a. Elisha is content with God’s provision and sees no reason to take this wealth. God is providing for him quite well and using him to perform miracles. What does Elisha need money for?
 - b. Compare Elisha with his servant Gehazi, who deceitfully takes the silver and clothing – and is rewarded with leprosy!
- c. Jesus
 - i. A poor man.
 - 1. We learned Joseph and Mary offered two turtle doves at his birth. He did not seem to fall into wealth! Had nothing during his ministry.
 - ii. Resisted Satan’s temptation for wealth, treasure
 - 1. “... the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, ‘All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.’ Then Jesus said to him, ‘Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.’” **(Luke 4:5-8)**
 - iii. Jesus was content in his poverty.
 - 1. Not covetous. Not greedy.
 - 2. Not anxious.
 - a. “Look at the birds of the air... consider the lilies of the field....” **(Matthew 6)**
 - b. Jesus may have been speaking these words for Himself! When he did not have food or clothing on a given day.

3. I think Jesus did everything he asked us to do: gave his cloak, fed the poor, clothed the naked; gave from His own possessions, even though he had very little wealth.

d. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 31:1-11**

i. Anxiety about wealth deprives us of sleep.

1. My wife Eva recently made a great observation: our anxiety for our material needs demonstrates our independence from God as much as our placing our trust in the wealth we have.
2. Having wealth (and relying on it instead of God) and not having wealth (and being anxious about it) both lead to unrighteous independence from our heavenly Father, who is able to sustain us.

ii. He who loves gold will not be called righteous

1. he who pursues profit will be led astray by it.
2. Senseless men are trapped by their pursuit of money.

iii. Money tests our hearts

1. “Who has been tested by it and found perfect? He has ground for boasting.”
2. Those with wealth (or even the opportunity to obtain it) and could have sinned, but did not. That is a worthy person!

iv. **Wisdom of Sirach 27:1-3**

1. Many have sinned to make a profit.
2. “As a stake will be driven tightly between fitted stones, so sin will be wedged between selling and buying.”
 - a. So many opportunities to sin in our businesses/work.
3. What is our help? How do we avoid these temptations?
 - a. To “hold steadfastly to the fear of the Lord.”
 - b. Remember, God sees everything in our work (how we deal with clients, colleagues/employees, the IRS, the quality of our work, our diligence).
 - c. He loves us; and He will bring everything into the light and judgment on that Last Day.

4. **Wisdom of Sirach 3:17-19**

- a. Sirach's admonition:
 - i. "The greater you are, the more humble you must be, and you will find grace before the Lord."
 - ii. Greatness, power, money can pull us away from God. Make us independent of God. As we have seen, this has a bad ending!
- b. Jesus was God Himself; He could not be greater. Yet He became the most humble man of all.
 - i. We see this in his death on a cross (**Philippians 2**) that we might be ransomed from sin.