The Illusion of Success

Text: James 5:1-6; Ecclesiastes 2: 1-11 (Esp. 1-2)

A. How do you define a successful life?
1. For some success is measured in respect to one’s family.
   a. Closeness of family unit and longevity of one’s marriage.
   b. Having one’s children well established in life.
2. Many view success as having accomplished the goals they set for life.
   a. Education, vocation, social
   b. Being happy, at least relatively contented and secure.
3. For many success in life is measured in achieving financial prosperity.
   a. Having a good job and a comfortable salary.
   b. Having a nice house, a good car and a few luxuries.
   * c. For most Americans this is success; it is defined purely in financial terms.

B. One who defines success in earthly terms has been ensnared by the devil.
1. I Tim. 6: 7-10 – For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.
2. How foolish to accumulate an abundance of things that must be left behind.
   Eccl. 2: 18-19 – Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.
3. I.I.L. – As a child, I caught as many chickens as possible when I visited my grandmother. It made her angry and before we left I had to turn them all loose.

C. It is more difficult for rich men to be saved than for poor men to be saved.
1. Luke 18: 24-25 – And Jesus looked at him and said, ”How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”
2. All Americans are rich; therefore, it is difficult for an American to be saved.
What makes it so difficult for a rich person to be saved? Look at three things:

1. The rich have a tendency to hoard wealth.
2. The rich have a tendency become greedy.
3. The rich often develop a desire for luxury.

I. The rich have a strong tendency to hoard wealth.

A. I worked for a cheap rich man who told me, “You can’t have it and spend it to.”

1. Wealth is generally accumulated little by little over a period of time.
2. The accumulation of assets becomes a lifestyle.
3. A rich man that still worked on the floor in a factory said, “You like to farm, Gary likes to hunt, Jerry likes to play golf, I like to make money.”
   a. Owned above 30 rental properties. (Profited .. $1,381,819 from stock sale)
   b. Purchased $400K worth of stock at $11 and sold it for $49, but kept working.
   c. Had repeated heart attacks, but came back to work ASAP … compulsive.
4. He loved money; so no matter how much he had, he would not spend it.

B. There is no sin in having wealth, but God gives it to be used for good. Not cherished

1. James 5: 2-3 – Your riches have rotten and your garments have become moth-eaten, 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!
   a. Rotted … food (grain, oil, wine, dried fruit)
   b. Moth-eaten … robes, especially ornate robes
   c. Rust … Gold and silver
2. In that day these were the instruments of wealth and currency.
   II King 5:5 – Then the king of Aram said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." He departed and took with him ten talents of silver and six thousand shekels of gold and ten changes of clothes
   a. Rotted … food (grain, oil, wine, dried fruit)
   b. Moth-eaten … robes, especially ornate robes
   c. Rust … Gold and silver
3. Moths eat and corrosion destroys ONLY that which is not being used.
4. The sin is not in possessing wealth, it is not using it to meet needs. Matt 19: 21

C. Why would people hoard wealth?

1. I Tim. 6: 17 – Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.
2. Behind the trust in riches is the fear that God will not provide.
D. The rich are commanded to use their wealth for good.

1. **1 Tim 6: 18-19** – Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

2. Warren Buffett says he will leave his money to charity but will keep it while he lives.

3. Rich or poor, judgment will come upon all flesh. *(Lk 19:1ff – account for minas)*
   a. Those who have used their resources for good and shared will have reward.
   b. Those who hoarded will have rust and moths as witnesses against them.

II. The rich have a strong tendency to become greedy.  

A. Research shows that very rich people still want more.

1. Billionaires still keep pursuing more wealth. Their life has been all about gathering.

2. They enjoy doing what made them rich; some want to be the richest.

3. Their life / their treasure is earthbound. *They have no eternal relationship with God.*

B. No matter how much they have, the rich seldom believe they have enough.

1. How much is enough? “Just a little more.”

2. Wealth makes them feel superior to others and they like the feeling.
   a. They want to be recognized as special and elevated.
      Vs. 3 – “Do not be conceited”
   b. 2: 2-3 … The rich like being treated as special. *Seated at the head table.*

C. The rich love money for the sake of having money.

1. It is not wrong to seek to gather money for a good project, *but just to hoard …*

2. It is sinful to desire to be rich.

   **1 Tim. 6: 8-10** – If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. *S#12.*
   9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many grieves.

3. Seeking to be wealthy brings with it punishment.

   **Prov. 28: 20** – A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished * S#13.
D. The desire for wealth often causes one to compromise his ethics.

1. **James 5: 4** – Behold, the **pay of the laborers** who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. (Hosts) (Not pay overtime when worker stays.)

2. God was especially watchful over the poor. **The rich exploit the poor . . . immigrants**
   **Deut. 24: 15** – You shall give him his wages on his day **before the sun sets,** for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the Lord and it become sin in you.

3. The laws of usury were to protect the poor from the rich. (RP = 10% daily interest)
   **Exod. 22: 25-26** – If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, you are not to act as a creditor to him; you shall **not charge him interest.**
   **26** If you ever take your neighbor’s **cloak as a pledge,** you are to return it to him before the sun sets, (Exploiters = payday loan, title)

E. Greed is idolatry.

1. **Col. 3: 5-6** – Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and **greed, which amounts to idolatry.**
   6 For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience,

2. The greedy person seeks what is created above the creator.

III. The rich very often develop the desire for a luxurious life style.

A. It is not easy to say no to luxury when it is freely available to you.

1. Years ago I saw an old movie where the plot was like that presented by James. A superior army came into a very rich city which did not have the ability to resist them. The rich people fed the strong soldiers and gave them wine until they became so weak they were easily defeated.

2. This is what Satan does to the rich. He indulged them until they lose strength.

3. Most great empires have degenerated from within in this manner. (Rome, U.S.)

B. Bro. James warns us not to allow this to happen to us.

1. **James 5: 5** – You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; **you have fattened your hearts** in a day of slaughter.

2. The moment one becomes a seeker of pleasure he becomes an idolater.

3. One cannot serve both God and pleasure. (Luke 16: 25 .. rich man enjoyed)
   a. Start off spending on pleasure and end up spend one’s self on pleasure.
   b. Those who do not know God try to fill that void with things and pleasures.

4. A life of **“life of wanton pleasure”** is without self-discipling or self-control.
C. The Apostle Paul describes those who live for pleasure like this:

1. **II Tim. 3: 2-5** – For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

2. Notice the contrast ... One is a lover of God –OR– a lover of pleasure, but not both.

3. When writing to Titus the Apostle refers to this lifestyle as foolish.
   a. **Tit. 3: 3** – For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. (cf. Eph. 2: 3)
   b. Luxury becomes addictive.

4. We redefine our luxuries as necessities.
   a. For many years Air Conditioning was considered a luxury.
   b. TV was something for rich people, but now people have multiple TVs.

D. The luxuriant lifestyle tends to make Christians unwilling to serve God.

1. **Service is the fruit of faith ... faith in action.**

2. Everyone is passionate about something; the world is passionate about pleasure.

3. Whatever we are passionate about, we serve. **How much effort do you expend for God.**

4. Remember what choked out the seed sown by God. (Parable of sower)
   Luke 8: 14 – The seed which fell among the thorns, these are the ones who have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity.

5. The seeking of earthly pleasures is the sin one commits when his heart is not satisfied with God. **Is your heart satisfied with God? Are you passionate?”**

**CONCLUSION:** There are not enough pleasures on this earth to satisfy one’s soul.

1. **Eccl. 2: 1-2** – I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?"

2. If the richest and wisest man on earth could not be satisfied by pleasures, **CAN YOU?**

3. God will not leave you unsatisfied. **He offers eternal joy in His house.**

**INVITATION:** … Communion slid
Lesson Text:

James 5: 1-6
1 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. 2 Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. 3 Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! 4 Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. 5 You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and put to death the righteous man; he does not resist you.

Ecclesiastes 2: 1-11
1 I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility. 2 I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men — many concubines.

9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. 10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.