

Making “Better” Choices

Intro: In every age the desire for wealth gets the highest priority in life. And so today we live in a world where the quest for riches, for material wealth and what it can buy, is probably one of the greatest aspirations of mankind. People often fantasize about what wealth can do for them. Some are even willing to resort to sinful activities to acquire it. Yet the Scriptures warn us that wealth can be quite deceitful, promising what it can't deliver.

Jesus in the parable of the sower warned that the deceitfulness of riches can choke out the influence of God's word in a person's life.

“And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.” (Matthew 13:22)

Paul likewise urged Timothy to warn the brethren about the love of money.

“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 a pang.” (1 Timothy 6:10)

All these warnings are verified in the OT by the teaching of Solomon. He was one of the richest men of the ancient world; yet his experience taught him that, not only is money not everything, but there are things that are far more valuable to acquire in life than wealth. Again and again in his court hearings he no doubt saw the corrupting influences of both greed and wealth; and it prompted him to instruct those who came to him in trouble to cultivate better priorities. Those priorities are couched in terms of what is “better” than riches. Twenty-one times in the Proverbs he tells us what is “better.”

His statements are valuable; because when we understand what is “better,” we make “better” choices. And when we make “better” choices, we are able to live a “better” life.

Wisdom is the better choice!

How much better it is to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding is to be chosen above silver. (Proverbs 16:16)

Wisdom personified speaks:

“My fruit is better than gold, even pure gold, and my yield than choicest silver. (Proverbs 8:19)

“For wisdom is better than jewels; And all desirable things cannot compare with her. (Proverbs 8:11)

For its profit is better than the profit of silver, And its gain than fine gold. (Proverbs 3:14)

We see people all around us in the endless pursuit of wealth, but seemingly spending almost no time seeking wisdom. What Solomon wanted all people to see is that the greatest acquisition of life is not wealth, but wisdom! It is the ability to know what is right, to choose the better path. And that wisdom is the result of fearing the Lord!

*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10)
Better is a little with the fear of the LORD, than great treasure and turmoil with it. (Proverbs 15:16)*

Righteous character is the better choice!

In the Proverbs Solomon explores the various aspects of righteous character, showing us that it is always better to pursue it than wealth. That righteous character is manifest by...

Just treatment of others

*Better is a little with righteousness than great income with injustice.
(Proverbs 16:8)*

Kindness to others

What is desirable in a man is his kindness, And it is better to be a poor man than a liar. (Proverbs 19:22)

Honesty and integrity

BETTER is a poor man who walks in his integrity Than he who is perverse in speech and is a fool. (Proverbs 19:1)

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, Than he who is crooked though he be rich. (Proverbs 28:6)

Humility

It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. (Proverbs 16:19)

Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant, than he who honors himself and lacks bread. (Proverbs 12:9)

For it is better that it be said to you, “Come up here,” Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince, Whom your eyes have seen. (Proverbs 25:7)

Self-control

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city. (Proverbs 16:32)

It is one of the few times that Solomon’s better comparison does not use riches as the point of comparison. But even here we see that self-control is better than having great earthly power.

A good name

A good name is to be more desired than great riches, Favor is better than silver and gold. (Proverbs 22:1)

Again we can see people all around us who will resort to almost any means to gain advantage over others. They will misrepresent the truth, act unjustly, misuse others, exalt themselves over others all to gain wealth. Solomon wanted people to see that it would be better to be poor than to become ungodly. Character matters! Jesus summarized it perfectly. What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?

Loving relationships is the better choice!

It is amazing how often people enter marriages and friendships out of desire for wealth only to live to regret it. Solomon urged the people of his day to see that loving relationships with others is far more important than earthly wealth.

Solomon valued relationships that were peaceable and pleasant.

BETTER is a dry morsel and quietness with it than a house full of feasting with strife. (Proverbs 17:1)

Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it. (Proverbs 15:17)

He suggests that even the closest of relationships like marriage is a source of vexation if it is not peaceable and pleasant. How many people marry “money” only to discover that they can’t get along with the person they married and consequently live in misery! Maybe Solomon intended this proverb for the foolish man who looked past a woman’s contentious character to her beauty or wealth only to end up living in conflict and misery.

It is better to live in a corner of a roof, than in a house shared with a contentious woman. (Proverbs 21:9; 25:24)

Solomon valued friends that were there for you in time of need.

Better is a neighbor who is near than a brother far away. (Proverbs 27:10)

He suggested a friend that would tell you the truth even if it hurt is better than one who cares but will not express it.

Better is open rebuke Than love that is concealed. (Proverbs 27:5)

All that is to say that no person, no matter how wealthy he is, will cherish a life where there is no real love between him and the people around him. And it reminds us that gaining loving relationships with people is more important than gaining riches.

Conclusion: What life teaches us is that money can be a good servant but a terrible master. Someone will put it:

Money will buy: A bed, but not sleep. Books, but not brains. Food, but not appetite. A house, but not a home. Medicine, but not health. Amusement, but not happiness. Finery, but not beauty. A crucifix, but not a Savior.¹

We all need money to survive; but we need wisdom, righteous character, and loving relationships to really live!

And just to think, Solomon said it almost three thousand years ago!

Serving God will put you on the path to better life; but more importantly it will put you on the path to eternal life!

¹ Michael P. Green, ed., [*Illustrations for Biblical Preaching: Over 1500 Sermon Illustrations Arranged by Topic and Indexed Exhaustively*](#), Revised edition of: The expositor’s illustration file. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989).