

Ecclesiastes 5: 11 and 12; "The Sleep of a Laboring Man is Sweet",
A Bible Study conducted on May 26th, 2010,
by Pastor Paul Rendall, at the Rendall home.

We have seen in our past study that the love of money, the love of silver, will not bring satisfaction to the heart of any man or woman; let alone a Christian man or woman. It is based on the sin of covetousness, and as such, it will lead the person who allows it to reign in their heart, to always want just a little more. I think that it was one of the Rockefellers who was asked just how much money was enough money? He said, "Just a little more." This is vanity Solomon says, and he is right. Why strive to have a lot of money if it will not satisfy you? It is because the impression is, that it will. But it really does not. Money is good for giving to Christ's kingdom and cause, and for meeting the needs of one's family, but every true Christian must learn that it will not satisfy his soul, except in the giving. "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Having money, however, may deceive a Christian into thinking that all is well with him spiritually, when actually he might be "poor, and blind, and naked". And, it is truly an awful thing to contemplate, that the unbelieving person's soul is being jeopardized by these desires for more and more wealth. "What will it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" Now here in verse 12, we find Solomon explaining something to us which is truly satisfying. It is the sleep of a laboring man. It is said here to be sweet. Now this is something to really think about. If you go on line to look for information about sleeplessness, you will find that "at least 40 million Americans suffer from chronic, long-term sleep disorders each year, and an additional 20 million experience occasional sleeping problems." "These disorders and the resulting sleep deprivation, it is said, interfere with work, driving, and social activities. I did not find any information on line in regard to the correlation between being rich and not sleeping, but the principle of our text in verse 12 is sufficiently clear: "The abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep." So what I want to do this evening is to first of all ask why it is that the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep? And then I will ask the question, secondly; Why is it that the sleep of the laboring man is sweet?

1st of all – Why is it that the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep?

You would think that having an abundance of goods would make the rich person feel more secure than the person not having many goods, and that he would be able to sleep better. But verse 11 gives us a clue. "When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes? In other words, the rich man sees his food being eaten up, and the things that he owns being used in such a way that he himself cannot enjoy what he

does have. He can only look on, and see what is going out, or what is departing. When goods increase, the rich man is more concerned to maintain, and to be able to hold on to, what he has, instead of being able to enjoy these things that he has. And sometimes, then, he might be worried that those who are eating of his goods; those who are his servants, those who are his employees, and those who are his relatives; might actually be using up his food and his house at such a rate, and they are living in such ways, that it causes him to worry about whether he would be able to continue to hold on to those goods. He might come to the place where he wonders whether he could continue to provide for himself, his servants, and his family, and so he loses sleep over it, because he is worried about the things which might happen to his wealth which he has worked hard for. He perhaps finds, that he cannot bring these concerns under his own immediate control, so that he feels secure enough to sleep. What is the problem here? Why can't he find sweet sleep? Well, let's look at a few verses and see if we can help this rich man, who is really a poor man, and to be pitied. Turn with me to Proverbs Chapter 23, and verse 4. "Do not overwork to be rich; because of your own understanding, cease!" "Will you set your eyes on that which is not?" "For riches certainly make wings; they fly away like an eagle toward heaven." One of the problems with a person's trying to be rich, or being rich is that they sometimes overwork to get it, and then they overwork to keep what they have. But there is an uncertainty even when you get riches, that you will be able to keep them. There are so many concerns, so many needs, so many demands, and then there is the uncertainty of the market in the economy, that we really do need to be careful that we are not placing too much stock in our own wisdom, rather than in trusting in God to provide for all of our needs. "Give us this day our daily bread" is a prayer asking for the needs of each day. The Lord did not say; Give us our weekly bread, our monthly bread, as though by our own efforts and skill that we can gain it and keep. He says that we should pray, "Give us our daily bread."

The real problem of the rich man who does not know God, and sometimes even the Christian who is trying hard to be rich, is that they do not see how God is sovereign over their obtaining wealth and He is the only One who can truly satisfy them in it, and with it. Are you using all the good business and financial principles that you know will build wealth? Then you still need to look to the Lord to build financially in the right way. Turn with me to Psalm 127, verse 1. "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain." "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so He gives His beloved sleep." (Or, as the NAS says, "He gives to His beloved, even in his sleep.") I wonder if each of us has really come to the place where we trust in the Lord and pray to the Lord to see this blessed reality come to pass. Do we really believe that the Lord is the one who builds the house, both in our family, and in the church? It is vain for the workmen who build, to build as if God did not have bless the building. It is vain for the watchmen who watch over what is built, guarding it day and night, and worrying

over it in the night when sleep is so needed. It is called, "eating the bread of sorrows," here in this passage. It is God who is the only one who can give you the sleep and rest that you need. Your trusting in Him that He is your keeper, the keeper of all those things, people, plans, and their prosperity; all these are kept for you to receive good from them the next day, and all the days of your life, according to His bidding. It is vain for you to worry over the outcome of all your labors. It is a needless thing to worry, if you are trusting in God to supply, to give you the ability to work, to build, and to succeed in your efforts. This applies to sleep as well. You must trust that God will give you good sleep if you are acting wisely in your business concerns.

Now 2ndly - Why is it that the sleep of the laboring man is sweet?

In the context of the verses that we are studying, the sleep of the laboring man is sweet because he is diligent, and God blesses diligence. The man is working hard and providing for his own needs and the needs of his family. In the purely human sense, he will get good sleep because he has been diligent in his labors, he has a clear conscience, and he is not worried about losing the things that he has worked hard for. He can lay down and sleep easily, in most cases, because he is tired. But he knows that it is a good tired, because he has put out his strength into his labors and he has tried to do a good job. Any moral man, any hard working person, any believer or unbeliever will know the reality of this principle. Because he has worked hard, a big meal will not churn around in his stomach making him uncomfortable, and a little meal will surely be appreciated. Either will do for him who is godly, because he is thankful for what God has enabled him to have and to enjoy. He may not have much but he is able to enjoy it, with God's blessing. Turn with me to Proverbs 12, verse 24. Here we are given further wisdom on why the sleep of a laboring man is sweet. "The hand of the diligent will rule, but the lazy man will be put to forced labor." "Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad." And verse 27 – "The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting, but diligence is man's precious possession." You can see from these verses that it does not take having great wealth and possessions to be able to be satisfied with good food or to get a good sleep. But it does take diligence and hard work during your times of work, and a lack of anxiety when it comes your time to lie down and go to sleep.

The laboring man is thankful for good sleep as well as a good meal. If he is a wise man, walking in the fear of the Lord, he is trusting in God for every good thing in his life. Diligence is his precious possession which allows him not to worry and to get good sleep night after night. If he is faithful in this diligence he will rule in the situations of work in which he finds himself. He may not become the president of the company, but he will move up in position and greater responsibility because he who is faithful in a little thing will be faithful in much. He may not always be able to rule over other men, but he will be able to rule over his own anxious thoughts as he remembers that he has tried to do his best in the job that he is doing. He is even diligent in the seemingly little details of life,

such as whether he roasts the meat that he has hunted for, knowing that working hard at making something taste good will be worth the effort, both to himself and to others. It is interesting that in the Jewish Targum this verse 12 is translated, "sweet is the sleep of a godly man that serves the Lord of the world with a perfect heart; and he shall have rest in the house of his grave, whether he lives a few years or more." And Bishop Patrick says in his commentary: "The word *haofed* (which we translate laboring man) signifies, one that serves; one who undertakes work for another; or any way ministers unto him." "The thing that distinguishes the godly person from the ungodly when it comes to sleep is that the godly man comes to his sleep, thinking about other people and praying for them; thinking about himself and how he might better serve God in relation to other people.

The godly man knows, or he should know, that the real way to obtain sweet sleep is by trusting in the Lord; that He will show you good when you turn to Him in prayer. Turn with me to Psalm 4, verse 1. "Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness!" "You have relieved me in my distress; have mercy on me, and hear my prayer." This is the way to find every good thing coming to you; to ask of God for it. The book of James says, "You have not because you ask not." "And when you ask you do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." (James 4: 3) But the thing that you are striving for as a Christian is to be able to do what is right. And this is what you pray for. You pray for good sleep that you may have wise discernment and strength for the coming day. And then, having prayed, you can expect that God will give what is good. And when you have gone about to do the right thing, then you pray further that God would relieve you from all distress concerning the consequences which might come to you from having done the right thing. The background of this Psalm was that there were a number of evil people who were trying to tear David from his throne. These people had sided with Absalom in his rebellion against his father's rule. Certainly David did deserve to have the kingdom torn from him and given to someone more worthy, because of his sin with Bathsheba and the disgraceful lie and cover-up that he was the author of Uriah's murder. But God had forgiven David of these sins when he confessed them, and now was chastening David for them through this very episode of Absalom's rebellion. His riches could not save him from this; he knew that he was at God's mercy. But he had faith that God could save him.

He knew that could still find help from God by trusting in God and pleading for His mercy to be shown to him. God is the God of your righteousness. He will relieve you in your distresses if you are trusting in His Son Jesus Christ. The temptation for David would be to become angry at Absalom and Ahithophel and Amasa, and the other men who were trying to take over the kingdom. Verse 4 says, "Be angry, and yet do not sin." "Meditate with your heart on your bed, and be still." "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord." That is what you should do to find sweet sleep. When you find that you cannot sleep, you pray. And as you pray you will meditate with your heart upon the events of the day and the events of your life. And when you think about these

things, you may find that you are angry as you think about what other people have done and said about you. But Verse 4 says, "Be still". Do not fret and be agitated. "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord." That is – you praise God and give Him thanks that He has ordered this for your good; He has ordered this to teach you, and you are willing to be taught; He has ordered this to show you that ultimately you can be satisfied with Him and the things that He will give you; more than anything that any rich man might have. Verse 6 says, "There are many who say, "Who will show us any good?" "Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us." "You have put gladness in my heart, more than in the season that their grain and new wine increased." "I will both lie down in peace and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety." There it is – the sleep of a working man, one who is laboring as unto the Lord, is sweet. The one who does all of his labor as unto God and Christ will find that by trusting in the Lord and praying, that in the vast majority of circumstances God will give to them sweet sleep. I find it very strong consolation that in Acts Chapter 12, that when Peter was taken prisoner by Herod, and Herod was intending to put Peter to death; that on the night before, Peter was sleeping, bound with two chains between two guards. Constant prayer was being offered for him by the church, and I am quite sure that is only God's mercy that he was released. But what consolation; to sleep on a night like that. He was laboring for Christ and the gospel. But still sweet sleep. May you and I find it as well.