

Ecclesiastes 6 - 12

As we press on in to the end of Ecclesiastes Solomon continues to remind us of the futility of different aspects of life, if in fact, this present life is all there is to life.

You can gain riches, you can be poor, you can be powerful or a pawn in the game of life as others manipulate you, but it makes no difference where you find yourself in life, because in the final analysis everyone goes to the grave.

And as we come to chapter 6 Solomon points out that as much as people want to enjoy life, there is the reality that you can be blessed by God Himself and still find yourself not participating in those blessings as others seem to enjoy those blessings in your place.

Ecclesiastes 6:1-2 ^{NAU} There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men-- ² a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires; yet God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction.

Essentially what Solomon is saying is that life is not fair. You work hard and toil after the good life and in the end you come up short and in some cases someone who has stumbled into the results of your labor is given the blessing on a silver platter.

By the way, this passage is somewhat prophetic as it appears that Solomon is the subject of this passage as the person described has been given riches, wealth and honor to where he lacks absolutely nothing.

How then might the end of that passage be dealing with Solomon where it says, “yet God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them.”?

Solomon knew he represented the King of kings and Lord of lords, and to the degree that Solomon was given, by God, the privilege and honor to represent God’s people in God’s Kingdom, the blessings of that kingdom were to benefit all of God’s people.

And yet, even before Solomon died he already knew that the kingdom, and blessings of that kingdom, would be torn from his hands and given to others. In fact, this was revealed to Solomon

because of the evil he had done in the sight of the Lord by marrying foreign women and then building altars to the gods of these women. And the Lord responded this way.

1 Kings 11:11-12 ¹¹ So the LORD said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. ¹² "Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, *but* I will tear it out of the hand of your son.

Solomon was given everything by God, and yet he and his descendants would not enjoy the benefits of these blessings because of the sin of Solomon, and this is the evil that Solomon sees that is prevalent among men who have been blessed by God as God tears those blessings from their hands.

The ultimate fulfillment would be found in the captivity of Israel and Judah as they are taken away to serve these foreigners in both Assyria and Babylon, as both nations enjoy the spoils of the once mighty Kingdom of Israel.

Sin tears every blessing from our grasp as far back as God tearing away of the Kingdom He gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, to where now it becomes only a memory of the glory days as they are banished and Cherubim guard the way back.

Truly, all of life now becomes vanity without any possibility of finding our way back to meaning and purpose in life. Until the promise is given by God to bless again, as the hope is restored in the Messiah who would one day restore Paradise, but only through the blood of His Son and His resurrection from the dead and ultimately through fire and judgment, which is what Peter reminds us of in his second epistle.

2 Peter 3:7 ⁷ But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

2 Peter 3:10-12 ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of

God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

Solomon got it right about life being vanity in a sin filled world, but he also knew that it is God who must be sought diligently to make any sense out of life.

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 ¹² Although a sinner does evil a hundred *times* and may lengthen his *life*, still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly. ¹³ But it will not be well for the evil man and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear God.

And of course, the fear of God that Solomon refers to is in the context of the vanity of life as people seek after things in this life that give them pleasure, or they believe will give them pleasure, not considering that their very breath comes from the Creator and God to whom they must give an account.

All of our lives are trapped in this cursed world and for the bulk of humanity they only see this world through their own wisdom instead of through the eyes of their Creator. And therefore, there is a sense in which the saying is true, live life with all the gusto you have. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die.

People know this instinctively and Solomon once again points this out.

Ecclesiastes 9:5-9 ⁵ For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. ⁶ Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun. ⁷ Go *then*, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works. ⁸ Let your clothes be white all the time, and let not oil be lacking on your head. ⁹ Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life and in your toil in which you have labored under the sun.

It's kind of like, 'well, if the only thing that matters to you is what is taking place in your life in this world then make the most of it, even though it's all vanity.' And that's the way chapter 9 ends.

Chapter 10 is a compilation of sayings as Solomon is kind of thinking out loud as it appears that he writes about things that pop into his head.

Ecclesiastes 10:1 ^{NAU} Dead flies make a perfumer's oil stink, so a little foolishness is weightier than wisdom *and* honor.

Ecclesiastes 10:8 ⁸ He who digs a pit may fall into it, and a serpent may bite him who breaks through a wall.

Again, these appear to be the musings of a man who understands the vanity of this world. Life goes on and stuff happens. But I like this one musing that Solomon employs in an obvious sarcastic way.

Ecclesiastes 10:19 ¹⁹ *Men* prepare a meal for enjoyment, and wine makes life merry, and money is the answer to everything.

As we come to chapter 11 Solomon is actually beginning to make a segue from everything being futility and vanity to encouraging the man or woman of God to continue to be diligent in life to God's glory even if you don't understand everything that is happening to you in this life, because God does as He has plans for you.

Ecclesiastes 11:1-5 ^{NAU} Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days. ² Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth. ³ If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies. ⁴ He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap. ⁵ Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones *are formed* in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.

What do you suppose Solomon is saying in the first verse?

Casting bread on the surface of the waters is an expression that intimates that you put the labor of your work out there and see what happens. Sometimes there's a return that may disappoint you or it may happily surprise you. Either way, as Solomon puts it, you will find it after many days.

In verse 2 it appears that Solomon is telling us to consider others in times of need. Again, all practical stuff that anyone could use, both the believer and unbeliever. And then in verse 3 he uses a couple of examples that imply the obvious.

Clouds that are full will eventually rain on the earth, and whether a tree falls toward the north or south it will still fall and where it falls is where it lies.

In today's vernacular we might say, life is what it is.

But in stating the obvious Solomon cautions us not to be complacent about life because of what appears to be an inability to change it at times, and with that attitude we're tempted to just disengage from life and let it all go by.

Ecclesiastes 11:4 ⁴ He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap.

People even back in Solomon's day were weather watchers, but simply because what we expect in life, like the weather patterns that often determines what we may or may not do, we still have work to do and we should do all with a vigor that understands that even though life may not turn out the way we expect we still serve a God who desires we trust Him in all things.

James 4:13-15 ¹³ Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit." ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, *you ought* to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that."

But whatever we do we need to have the right attitude as we consider the God who has given us life in His son.

Colossians 3:23-24 ²³ Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.

Does anyone see the incentive for doing our work heartily for the Lord today in this verse?

What is the reward of the inheritance?

1 Peter 1:3-7 ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith,

being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

The inheritance is the Kingdom of God in our resurrected bodies on a resurrected earth in the midst of a resurrected universe with our resurrected King physically taking up residence on the new earth in the New Jerusalem where we will rule and reign with Him forever.

When we have the hope of the inheritance set before us we can look past this world and into the eyes of God and know that He is on a path of bringing us home with Him forever. God is still on the throne even though we may not know everything concerning His will for our lives.

Ecclesiastes 11:5 ⁵ Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones *are formed* in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.

God is still creator and we are still His creation. He knows us intimately, in Christ, and He will never let us go, despite our inability to figure all of this life out at times.

Chapter 12 concludes the writings of the Preacher and we finally arrive at a place where vanity is put into perspective with more clarity as Solomon encourages us to focus our eyes toward the One we can trust.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-4 ^{NAU} Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"; ² before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; ³ in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; ⁴ and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly.

Why do you suppose Solomon concludes with these words, "Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth."

It is in youth that most people don't look at life from the long haul. When we were young our only concerns were getting together with friends to play hide and seek, or baseball or to share stories with our closest friend or read books of fairy tale lands.

We weren't concerned with getting a job at 8 years old, or worrying about the stock market taking a dive, we just wanted to play. And what Solomon is reminding us about in this verse is that from a young age, never forget who your God is and the ways in which He blesses, because there will come a day where most of the play goes away.

But Solomon doesn't use the word God in verse one. What word does He use to describe God and why?

Remember the theme of these writings. Life is vanity and futility.

But when was that vanity and futility first introduced into life?

In the Garden after the fall of man.

The first man and woman knew God in a very unique way. They fully understood where they came from. The man knew he was formed by God from the dust of the ground and the woman knew she was formed from the side of Adam.

They knew God as the Creator. **Genesis 1:1** ^{NAU} In the beginning God created...

If God is Creator then who else should we look to when we want answers about the creation in which we live?

Unfortunately, the creation in which we live, which was once deemed very good by our Creator, has become cursed in a very bad way, and Solomon is reminding us that life can turn from the pleasant days of our youth to something not so pleasant.

Ecclesiastes 12:1-3 ^{NAU} Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"; ² before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; ³ in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim;

This is a picture of the sometimes hard and final days of life when we are all well past our youth. As I've heard the saying before, youth is wasted on the young. And Solomon is saying to us, take what you enjoyed about your youth, particularly that faith of a child, and bring it with you along the journey as you hope in and trust your Creator who is your Savior.

Ecclesiastes 12:6-7 ⁶ *Remember Him* before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; ⁷ then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

This is where we are all moving toward and for the one who knows God we will return to Him even as Paul understood, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Ecclesiastes 12:8 ⁸ "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!"

Yes, this life is set on a course of destruction as all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. And yes, because of the curse parts of life can be very difficult. And yes, it can certainly appear to be vanity, but only if life is from the perspective of the world and not from an understanding of God's eternal plan.

If we know God through faith in Christ then we have learned what the fear of the Lord is all about and we know that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. And it is that wisdom that leads to life.

And this is how Solomon ends this writing.

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 ¹³ The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. ¹⁴ For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

For the unbeliever this judgment will be final and it will result in an eternal vanity and futility. For the believer this judgment has already been dealt with once and for all at the cross of Christ and we can rejoice with Paul.

Romans 8:1 ^{NAU} Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

And with that understanding we can also say with Paul...

Romans 8:18-21 ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free

from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.