

“Money Matters” (part 2)

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Take your Bible and be finding your place in the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 6. I want to pick up where we left off last week, in a section where King Solomon addresses the subject of money, wealth, and possessions. Keep in mind that he has been on a quest to find satisfaction, and he tells us here that it can't be found in money nor the things that money can buy.

I imagine that most of us are familiar with the story of King Midas from Greek mythology. Midas was the king of Phrygia, who ruled over his people from a lavish castle surrounded by a beautiful garden. One day, some of his servants found an old man in the garden's vicinity and, after capturing him, brought him to the king who treated him kindly. Unbeknownst to King Midas, the old man happened to be the son of Dionysus, one of the gods. In gratitude for his hospitality, Dionysus granted Midas one wish.

Now, King Midas could have asked for almost anything, but he opted for a somewhat strange thing—he asked Dionysus for the ability to turn into gold everything he touched. (The Midas Touch)

His wish granted, Midas went away trying it out. He first turned some stones into gold. Afterward, he did the same to an ear of corn and some apples. It would seem that there would be no end to his happiness.

Well, at least not until he got home and felt some hunger and some thirst. He suddenly realized that it was all but impossible to satisfy his hunger—both his food and his drink turned into gold as well, the minute they touched his mouth. He starved to death.

Now, that is a fictional story, but it illustrates what Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes 5-6. He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves

wealth with his income. Gold may glitter, wealth may entice, but it will not satisfy. The love of money is a deadly trap to the one who gets caught up in it.

From chapter 5, I have already pointed out a couple of key ideas that the Preacher explains for us. The first involved:

1. PITFALLS to be avoided (5:8-17)

Solomon shows us the potential dangers of covetousness. Covetousness is loving money and making a god out of it. It is a root from which many other sins shoot and bear their rotten fruit in the lives of both individuals and societies. It is this very thing that the Bible repeatedly warns us against in so many places.

1 Timothy 6:10—“For the love of money is a root of all kinds evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

Money love is a deadly trap that you and I can fall into if we are not extremely careful. There are so many pitfalls, so many dangers connected to this issue. Solomon mentions at least five, which we've already considered:

- Unsatisfied desires (v. 10)
- Unwise expenditures (v. 11)
- Unhealthy anxieties (v. 12)
- Unfortunate losses (v. 13-14)
- Unrealized consequences (v. 15-17)

2. PRINCIPLES to be applied (5:18-20)

He shows us at the close of chapter 5 that only God can bring satisfaction and joy to the human heart. It is God who gives us the ability to earn a living, and it is also God who gives us the ability to enjoy our lives. The idea is that without

reference to Him, money and wealth cannot be seen in their proper light. When God is central in one's life like He ought to be, then life is seen as a gift to be enjoyed.

In chapter 6, Solomon shows us what it looks like when God is not central. A person may have all the money in the world and the stuff that money can buy, but not have the ability to enjoy life because God isn't at the center.

Having mentioned some pitfalls to avoid and principles to apply, the Preacher goes on to mention some:

3. PURSUITS to be analyzed (6:1-12)

“There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.”

Solomon recognizes that a person can have an abundance of wealth and still lack the power to enjoy it and see it in its proper light. Rather than enjoying it, they are enslaved by it. They may drive a brand new vehicle, wear the latest fashions, and have the greatest stuff that money can buy, but they lack inner contentment.

The key phrase here is this—“...God does not give him power to enjoy.” It is yet another reminder from the pen of the Preacher that enjoyment doesn't come from what we have or don't have under the sun. Rather, enjoyment is a gift that God must give. It is something that can only be possessed through knowing Christ.

There are several pursuits in life that Solomon analyzes here in chapter 6.

Notice that he first mentions:

Money without meaning (v. 1-2)

“There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.”

The man that Solomon describes here is someone that we would say has ‘got it made.’ He is someone to whom God has given wealth, possessions, and honor, so much so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires. But in spite of his lavish situation, he can’t enjoy it. He’s empty inside.

It is a paradoxical situation. It could be that Solomon is providing us with a glimpse of his own self-portrait here.

It is interesting that this very same list of benefits is said to have been given to Solomon by the Lord:

2 Chronicles 1:11-12—“Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked for possessions, wealth, honor, or the life of those who hate you, and have not even asked for long life, but have asked for wisdom and knowledge for yourself that you may govern My people over whom I made you king, wisdom and knowledge are granted to you. I will also give you riches, possessions, and honor, such as none of the kings had who were before you, and none after you shall have the like.”

As a young man, Solomon knew the task before him was bigger than he could handle. He needed God! The hand of God had been with his father David, and Solomon recognized that his own success would only come by the hand of God. So he asked God for wisdom. In response, God gave him the wisdom he needed—but God also gave him what he didn’t ask for.

How true it is of God that He gives us more than we ask! He knows we possess neither the wisdom nor the courage to ask what we should of Him. Our little

minds cannot fathom all that He longs to bestow upon us, so He always gives us more than we request. Like the psalmist says, our cups overflow, and surely the Lord's goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives.

The Bible says that in Jesus Christ, we have been blessed:

Ephesians 3:20—“...exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.”

God did more for Solomon than he asked for, and as long as he was humbled by it and God was kept at the center of it, things went well. However, it wasn't long before the Lord was pushed to the periphery of Solomon's life.

One of the most disappointing stories in Scripture is found in 1 Kings 11 in which we read about Solomon's fall into spiritual compromise and idolatry. He had been blessed beyond measure, but the gifts became more important than the One who gave them in the first place. God was moved to the sideline of his life.

King Solomon began to lean on his financial wealth to the detriment of his spiritual health. The very one who had been so wise became foolish, and through his idolatry he introduced a deadly virus in his kingdom. It would come to a head some 400 years later as the people are led away.

Solomon knew firsthand what it meant to have money, but to have lost one's sense of meaning. Whether himself or another, the man he describes had been blessed financially but he was bitter spiritually. He lacked the power to enjoy the things he had in his possession. In other words, God gave him stuff, but He didn't give him satisfaction.

It is a fundamental fact of life that you cannot truly enjoy the gifts of God apart from the God of the gifts.

Luke 12:15—“Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”

Consider the tragic case of the rich young ruler! Here was a young man who had great wealth, yet he was empty on the inside. He knew that he lacked eternal life. And yet his riches were more important to him than following Jesus.

Matthew 19:23-24—“And Jesus said to His disciples, ‘Truly, I say to you, only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.’”

The reason is that the rich face the temptation of being so wrapped up in their wealth that they lose sight of what’s truly valuable. They have the blessing of stuff, but they live under the burden of no satisfaction.

Comfort without contentment (v. 3-6)

“If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life’s good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to one place?”

To pursue money without meaning is a vain pursuit, and to pursue comfort apart from contentment is also a vain pursuit. Notice that Solomon mentions things such as fathering a hundred children and living many years. (Nothing would have conveyed a sense of comfort and security in the Jewish mind any more

than the idea of an abundance of heirs and years.) He speaks of one who has children and lives many years, but his soul isn't satisfied.

You can have all the comfort the world can afford, but still lack contentment. The point here is obvious—you can have more children than anyone else and live twice as long as anyone else, but if God is not central, it's all empty.

In order to make his case that money and wealth is empty apart from God, the Preacher gives two illustrations. In the illustrations, he uses exaggeration as he compares a child who dies at birth to a man who lives 2,000 years.

The point that Solomon makes is this—life without God is worse than never having been born in the first place. And yet life with God at the center is deeply satisfying, whether a person has little or much. It's not the years in life but the life in the years. God alone supplies us with the wisdom to know what to do with what we have.

No one expressed this truth any clearer than Jesus:

Matthew 6:19-21—“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Employment without enjoyment (v. 7-9)

“All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.”

Some try to find their ultimate worth in money, others try to find it in heirs and years, and others still try to find in their vocation. Notice that Solomon refers to the ‘toil’ of man, which is his way of referring to employment and work. Which by the way, pay close attention to how important all of these various pursuits are in life. Money, family, work. They are all interrelated and descriptive of our earthly experience, right?

True enjoyment comes only when God is kept center!

Solomon says, “All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.” We work to eat. We can become so wrapped up in career success that we lose sight of what work is intended for in the first place.

“Appetite”—*Hebrew word is ‘nephesh’ and means soul; it is the same word that is used in verse 3*

This is the same word used in the creation account:

Genesis 2:7—“Then the Lord God formed the man of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living soul.”

When Adam sinned, he died spiritually. He passed sin and death down to his children. To be in Adam is to be dead spiritually. It is to be cut off from the all satisfying presence of God. That is why the human soul isn’t satisfied. Work and wealth doesn’t bring satisfaction to an empty life.

No amount of work will ever address the problem of the soul. Only the finished work of Christ gets to the heart of the matter, which is really a matter of the heart.

Look at what the Preacher says in verse 9:

“Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite.”

It is Solomon's way of saying that it is better to have a little and enjoy it from a heart that is content in the Lord rather than living with an aching restlessness in your soul. Better to be content with what you have than to have a soul that is ever seeking but never finding.

Better to be content than always looking for the next thing.

You can go through life waiting on the next promotion, the next pay increase, the next vacation, the next relationship, the next...the next...the next. That is what Solomon calls the 'wandering of the appetite.' Our desires are always on the move, but never arriving.

Philip Ryken—*“A striking example of perpetual dissatisfaction comes from the excavations at the city of Pompeii. When Vesuvius erupted and Pompeii was buried, many people perished, with their body shapes, postures, and in some instances their facial expressions preserved in volcanic ash. One woman's feet were pointed in the direction of the city gate, headed for safety. Yet her face was turned back to look at something just beyond the reach of her outstretched hands. She was grasping for a prize—a bag of pearls.”*

We are constantly faced with the temptation of turning from life to death by reaching for something that we think will satisfy us, our own 'bag of pearls' whatever it may be.

Matthew 16:26—**“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?”**

Only Jesus can satisfy the soul! What we need is what Henry Scougal called 'the life of God in the soul of man.' Have you ever stopped to consider that maybe you can't enjoy what you already have because Jesus is not at the center of it? Rather than being central in your life, He's been pushed to the peripheral.

Living without life (v. 10-12)

“Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell man what will be after him under the sun?”

Solomon says that we can pursue money without meaning, have comfort without contentment, experience employment without enjoyment, and ultimately be living without life. It is a tragic thing that a person can have wealth and length of days, and yet still be empty of true life.

Solomon asks basic questions about life and death.

Look at verse 10:

“Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is...”

God is the Creator and Author of life, and He is sovereign over man the creature. How foolish it would be for me to think that I know better than He does when it comes to life.

God made us. He knows what we are like, how we are to function, what will satisfy and what will not. Money and riches and being successful won't satisfy us because God didn't design us to be satisfied that way. So why argue with Him and insist on going at life without Him?

God alone knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life which pass like a shadow.

I don't know if you have noticed this or not, but Solomon has been saying the same thing over and over again throughout Ecclesiastes. His message to us is this—don't get so caught up in making a living that you neglect to have a life.

Don't be so caught up with money and possessions and work that you can't enjoy the life that God gives.

We need to understand the Preacher's purpose—by talking openly about life's disappointments, he's trying to awaken our longing for the Lord. Money, wealth, material comfort, and length of days does not guarantee life.

John 10:10—“I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it more abundantly.”

Abundant life is what God desires to give you in Christ.

Abundant life cannot be bought in a store, it cannot be earned on the job, it cannot be achieved through personal effort. It can only be received in faith, for it is the free gift of God's grace. Only Jesus can give me life and the power to enjoy it. He is able to do so because He died for my sins on the cross and makes me righteous by His resurrection life. And one day He is going to take me to heaven, and I will forever live in His satisfying presence.

Now I can truly enjoy life because I know it isn't found in the things that God gives, but in Jesus Christ Himself. (illus. by David Jeremiah)

More than 100 years ago, there was a carpenter whose name was George Young. Both he and his wife were committed believers who loved the Lord Jesus. When George surrendered to preach, they traveled from church to church in revival meetings. Their finances were always tight, but somehow they always had what they needed.

After many years, they finally managed to save enough money to buy a small piece of land on which George built a small house. While it certainly wasn't much by today's standards, it was the fulfillment of a dream, and when they moved in they dedicated their house to God. Some time later when the Youngs were away on a trip, a man who had been offended by George's preaching set their house

on fire. When they returned home, all they had left was a heap of ashes. All of their belongings and cherished possessions had gone up in smoke.

As George gazed at the ruins, he began to think about the things he had that no fire could ever destroy—his family, his relationship with Jesus, his ministry, and his home in heaven. Words began coming to his mind in the form of a hymn. Within a few days, he had written some lines of verse that he gave the title, “God Leads His Dear Children Along.” The chorus says:

*Some thro' the waters, some thro' the flood
Some thro' the fire, but all thro' the blood.
Some thro' great sorrow, but God gives a song
In the night season and all the day long.*

He wrote that hymn in 1903. Years later, a music publisher named Haldor Lillenas who was deeply touched by the hymn decided to track down George’s widow. He made the trip to a small Kansas town where she resided, and he was alarmed to discover that she was living in a rundown poor house. He was troubled that the widow of the author of such a well-known hymn should spend her final days in the poorhouse. After asking her why, the elderly Mrs. Young said to him:

“One day God took my sweet husband home. O, how I missed him, for we had always served the Lord together. In my heart I wondered, where will God lead me now? Dr. Lillenas, God led me here! I’m so glad He did, for you know, about every month someone comes into this place to spend the rest of their days, and Dr. Lillenas, so many of them don’t know my Jesus. I’m having the time of my life introducing them to Him!”

That is someone who knew what it meant to enjoy the life that God had given her in Christ—a life with Him at the center.