

Daily Bible Study

“A Self Portrait of Futility”

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

June 16 – June 22, 2013

MONDAY –In our text, **Ecclesiastes 6:1-12** we see Solomon give a “*self portrait of futility*” if you will; as he describes the ultimate meaninglessness of materialism. We mentioned before that he uses 3 memorable phrases in this book and we will see all three of them here in our text. They are “*under the sun*”, “*vanity*”, and “*grasping for the wind*”. They truly summarize this section as Solomon is writing from the perspective of a man who has pursued happiness and fulfillment apart from God. We will learn that man deprives himself of the good he might have enjoyed from his material possessions by not consecrating them to God. If an individual does not desire to serve God with what he has, God may deny him the power to even serve himself with the things he possesses. The bottom line is the same as it always is; those who have much and don’t have Jesus will always be craving. Even Christian people can suffer from this sin of discontentment and misplace their loyalties and loves and therefore suffer from this same emptiness that Solomon laments. Jesus and a desire to serve Him by being like Him (serving others and not Himself for the glory of God) is the only bread that satisfies hunger and the only water that satisfies a thirsty soul. Listen to the preacher: **Ecclesiastes 6:1-12**: “*There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction. If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better than he—for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man, even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place? All the labor of man is for his mouth, And yet the soul is not satisfied. For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have, Who knows how to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind. Whatever one is, he has been named already, For it is known that he is man; And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he. Since there are many things that increase vanity, How is man the better? For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?*”

Suggestion for Prayer: God, teach me how meaningless material things are apart from You and how futile life is when it is lived for myself and not Your glory and the good of others.

TUESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 6:1-2**: “*There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.*” The opening verse not only tells us that men in *common* share in *an evil*, but in the Hebrew language we find an emphasis on the *evil* itself being a heavy thing upon men. The phrase literally says the *evil* “is a great thing on man”. The NIV translates the phrase “weighs heavily” and we understand that this is a big deal, a heavy burden, a real problem. Solomon knew this and his own experience is where he so eloquently draws from as he laments the weight of this burden as he writes. Solomon learned a simple fact the hard way that many people today are learning. The fact that God is the provider of all good things and enjoyment itself (including the enjoyment of things) is a gift from God. Solomon asked God for *an understanding heart to judge Your people (1 Kings 3)* and God made him the richest man in his generation (2 Chronicles 1:11–12) giving him not only wisdom but *riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires*. In Proverbs, it appears that Solomon got this fact (**Proverbs 8:18, 22:4**) but somewhere along the road of life he also appears to have forgotten this and we see the lamenting self-portrait here being drawn. The man who once recognized God and His hand in all of life’s blessings has now developed the mindset so prevalent today, the mindset of the “self-made man”—“You worked hard for it, you did it, you deserve it; enjoy”. What folly and futility! The power to enjoy these things is a gift from God but here in our text we read that God withdraws the *power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it*. We are not told why he cannot enjoy them just that he can’t. Many have tried to pin down the reason; is man’s sin the cause? Solomon puts an emphasis on God’s Sovereignty that we can’t ignore (*yet God does not give him power*). Job was a man who experienced this and was not doing so because of sinful behavior. What did he say? “*The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD*” (**Job 1:21**). Job as opposed to Solomon did not have his eyes focused “*under the sun*” and could see this fact. The man living for the moment and its benefits will be driven to despair when God withholds the “blessings”. He will not find an earthly reason for this horror and he certainly will not see a heavenly reason. Beloved, you can’t truly enjoy the gifts without the Giver.

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me know that You are Sovereign not me and when life doesn’t seem to be going the way I desire or think is best I may be focused too much “under the sun”. Teach me to be content with what You have given; enjoying and serving You & others.

WEDNESDAY – **Ecclesiastes 6:3-6**: “*If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better than he—for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man, even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?*” Men are not likely to beget a hundred children

although as an interesting side note, Solomon's son Rehoboam had 88 children, but they were not from the God designed one flesh monogamous marriage but rather from 18 wives and 60 concubines (**2 Chronicles 11:21**). Sadly, and learn from it brothers; "like father, like son". The point Solomon is making in these verses is that no matter how much you possess, even if they are "things" deemed as God's blessings, if you don't possess the power to enjoy them, you might just as well never have been born. He pictures the futility of this by using an illustration that would be familiar to his readers. At that time, abundant resources and a large family were marks of God's favor but if a man with even that favor was *not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial* (he was not mourned properly at death; had no proper funeral) it would be better for him to have been *a stillborn child*. The man pictured here had a family that really didn't love him but waited around for him to die so they could get to the reading of his will. This rich man was really poor. He couldn't enjoy his money or possessions and he couldn't enjoy his family because there was no love in the home. They didn't even mourn and cry when he died. Abundant blessing, without the God who gives the ability to rejoice in it, compares a *man, who lives a thousand years twice and a stillborn child*. At that time in Jewish culture, *a stillborn child* was not always given a name in an attempt to help the parents get over their sorrow sooner. The NIV translates **verse 4**, "*It [the child] comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded*". Since we are on this topic, we often ask the "Why" questions concerning stillborn or "premature" deaths such as "Why did God have this child conceived if it wasn't going to live?" Here, the wise Solomon asks "Why did God give this man wealth and a family if he couldn't enjoy it?" We must humbly bow before the Lord while covering our mouths from foolish questions of the Almighty and accept the answer that God does all things well for His glory and our good (**Romans 8:28**). Finally we learn in the last verse that the 2,000-year-old man and the stillborn baby both end up in the same place—the grave. Once again we are confronted with and reminded of the certainty of death and the futility of life without God.

Suggestion for Prayer: God, help me walk with You in the awareness of Your sovereignty over life. Give me the ability & desire to enjoy You & be satisfied with the blessings You bestow.

THURSDAY – Ecclesiastes 6:7-9: "*All the labor of man is for his mouth, And yet the soul is not satisfied. For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have, Who knows how to walk before the living? Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.*" Solomon addresses both the rich and the poor man in his book and one common denominator to both is the fact they both labor to stay alive. Even after all this labor, *the soul is not satisfied*. **Verse 7** states that appetite is the real motive behind human effort and no one is ever fully satisfied. **Verse 8** looks at wisdom and concludes it is no particular advantage either. There is an insatiable appetite for wealth by the greedy and there is a similar desire of the intellectual for knowledge. Solomon seems to believe his readers may now agree to the fact that pursuing wealth is folly and they may feel it is a bit

more dignified or acceptable to devote their lives to the quest for knowledge. Either pursuit without God or His blessing is of any worth. As far as knowledge is concerned the learned (*wise man*) has no significant advantage over the unlearned (*the fool*). Furthermore, social graces do *the poor man* no good either. Finally **Verse 9** asserts it is better to be satisfied with what one has (*the sight of the eyes*) than to be continually driven to obtain more (*than the wandering of desire*). This is Solomon's version of "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush". He is saying the grass isn't always greener on the other side of the fence and it's better to have a little and really enjoy it than to dream about much and never attain it. He isn't saying that it is wrong to dream big but he is saying that we better make sure our dreams and ambitions are motivated by the glory of God and not our selfishness. Jesus summed it up so very well; "*My food, is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work*" (**John 4:34**).

Suggestion for Prayer: Father, help me believe satisfaction is in seeking Your glory & being about Your work not my own. Help me be content & satisfied with "the bird in my hand".

FRIDAY – Ecclesiastes 6:10-12: "*Whatever one is, he has been named already, For it is known that he is man; And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he. Since there are many things that increase vanity, How is man the better? For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?*" This point is the middle portion of the book of Ecclesiastes and it is seen by scholars as a turning point where the preacher moves away from merely describing his search for satisfaction and meaning and begins to focus on advice and instruction concerning the future. He starts where any man should; at the Sovereignty of God. God has *named already whatever one is*. Men like to name things and even where commanded to (**Genesis 2:19–20**) but God and His sovereign Word are both creative and powerful. God spoke and everything was brought into being (**Genesis 1:1ff, Hebrews 1:1-2, Matthew 8:8**). Isaiah remind us that God's Word will accomplish what He pleases (**Isaiah 55:11**). *For it is known that he is man* is used by Solomon most likely referencing the naming of *man (adam)* by God. God is God; men are men (**Psalm 9:20**). We can't *contend with Him*; His sovereignty is indisputable (**Romans 9:20**—"*But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?*"). We see the number of foolish words man utters or things he gathers to himself in attempt to elevate himself over God in the phrase *...many things that increase vanity*. Knowledge, wealth or status doesn't give him any kind of sovereignty—they just increase the vanity; it's all talk. **Verse 12** points us to the future holder; God himself. Men may get tarot card readings and horoscopes but *Who can tell a man what will happen after him* except God? Destiny lies in the hand of a Sovereign God. Adam attempted to become "*like God...*" (**Genesis 3:5**) *contending with Him* and he discovered his own mortality, weakness, and the real meaning of his own name before God. Adam has shown us who bear his name what we are before God as well; weak sinful mortals standing in need of forgiveness and salvation before an omnipotent God.

Suggestion for Prayer: God, help me see my need of salvation, repent & believe in Jesus.