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The Frustration Of Life

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Introduction

1. The verses before us here in Ecclesiastes 6 naturally follow those which we examined from chapter five last week.
2. Solomon continues with observations on the meaninglessness of materialism.
3. Someone has described these verses as 'a self-portrait of Solomon,' one 'painted in words.'
4. In verse 19 of chapter 5, Solomon has told us the ability to enjoy the gifts which God has given us is itself "the gift of God" (Ecclesiastes 5:19).
5. Now, here in chapter 6, Solomon addresses some of the conundrums of life:
 - a. Wealth without enjoyment (vv. 1-6)
 - b. Labor without satisfaction (vv. 7-9)
 - c. Things we cannot change or understand (vv. 10-12)

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A. WEALTH WITHOUT ENJOYMENT

"There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men— 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."

(Ecclesiastes 6:1-2, NASB95)

1. Solomon writes of “an evil” which he has witnessed and says that “it is prevalent among men.”
 2. This last phrase — “it is prevalent among men” — is better translated . . .
 - a. “It lies heavy on mankind” (ESV).
 - b. “Weighs heavily on men” (NIV84).
 - c. “Weighs heavily on humanity” (HCSB).
 3. Solomon has observed “a man” who has been abundantly blessed by God: “God has given [him] riches wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires” (v. 2a).
 4. Solomon was such a person (cf. 1 Kings 3:13).

“I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days.” (1 Kings 3:13, NASB95)
 5. The problem which this man experienced is though he had all that his heart desired, God had not enabled him to enjoy those things.
 6. For whatever reason, a stranger was enjoying them instead.
 7. To have all the resources for a satisfying life and yet not be able to enjoy them for one reason or another isn’t just frustrating, it can be tragic:
 - a. How many of us have known someone who worked hard all his or her life and looked forward to a comfortable retirement only to have a heart attack and either die or become incapacitated as a result?
 - b. Or perhaps there was a crisis in the family which began not only to drain the family finances, but also strained the physical and emotional well-being of various family members.
 - ❑ Why do these things happen?
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8. Solomon has been giving us the answer almost since the beginning:

“I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one’s lifetime; moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.” (*Ecclesiastes 3:12-13*)

“Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.” (*Ecclesiastes 5:19*)

9. God is the one who makes it possible for us to enjoy what He has given us.
10. Greater possessions do not guarantee greater enjoyment.
11. The question that comes to our minds is “Why would God withhold our enjoyment of those things which He has given us the ability to have?”
12. We find the answer back in *Ecclesiastes 2:25-26a*:

“For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy . . .” (*Ecclesiastes 2:25–26a, NASB95*)

13. Who does God consider to be good in His sight?
 - a. That person who is living a life of faithful obedience before God (*Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38*).

“But the righteous man shall live by faith.” (*Romans 1:17, NASB95*)

- b. That person who lives a life of continual gratitude to God (1 *Thessalonians 5:18*).

“in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 *Thessalonians 5:18, NASB95*)

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13. Beginning in verse 3, Solomon presents us with an illustration:

“If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, however many they be, but his soul is not satisfied with good things and he does not even

have a proper burial, then I say, “Better the miscarriage than he, for it comes in futility and goes into obscurity; and its name is covered in obscurity. It never sees the sun and it never knows anything; it is better off than he. Even if the (other) man lives a thousand years twice and does not enjoy good things—do not all go to one place?” (*Ecclesiastes 6:3–6, NASB95*)

a. Solomon uses exaggeration to make his point:

1) He has great progeny — “a hundred children”

a) Gideon had 70 sons through many wives (*Judges 8:30*)

b) Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, had 88 children through 18 wives and 60 concubines (*2 Chronicles 11:21*).

2) He enjoys a long life — “the man lives a thousand years twice”

a) This would have been more than two lifetimes for Methuselah who lived to be 969 years old (*Genesis 5:27*).

b. This man had abundant resources and a large family which, in Solomon’s time, were marks of God’s special favor.

c. However, his family did not love him, because when he died, they did not mourn his passing — “he does not even have a proper burial” (v. 3).

d. Solomon’s point is this: No matter how much you possess, if you don’t possess the power to enjoy it, you might just as well never have been born.

e. At least he would have been spared the toil, anxiety and misery of a soul that was never satisfied.

f. He then adds that both the wealthy man and the stillborn share the same fate — they both “go to the same place” (*NIV84*).

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B. LABOR WITHOUT SATISFACTION

“All a man’s labor is for his mouth and yet the appetite is not satisfied. For what advantage does the wise man have over the fool? What advantage does the

poor man have, knowing how to walk before the living? What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires. This too is futility and a striving after wind.”

(*Ecclesiastes 6:7-9, NASB95*)

1. Solomon now turns from the rich man to the poor man and the general insatiability of human life.
2. “All a man’s labor” Solomon tells us, “is for his mouth” — that is, it serves to satisfy a person’s appetite, to find pleasure and contentment.
3. However, in spite of this, “the appetite (lit. “soul”) is not satisfied.”
4. Why do you and I eat? Is it not to add years to our lives?
5. What good is it to add years to our lives, *if we do not add life to our years?*
6. “If all [a person] does is live to satisfy [his] appetite, then the wise man has no advantage over the fool, nor does the poor man have any advantage in trying to better his situation and learning to get along with the rich.” (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, p. 77)
7. In these verses, Solomon is neither belittling education nor self-improvement, but that these things, in and of themselves, cannot make life richer.
8. “We must have something greater for which to live.” (Ibid, p. 77).
9. Solomon’s statement in verse 9, “What the eyes see is better than what the soul desires,” is like the familiar saying, “*A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*”
10. He is telling us, “It’s better to have little and really enjoy it than to dream about much and never attain it.”
11. There is nothing wrong with dreaming big dreams or having a burning ambition to accomplish something in life, but we must be sure that our ambition is motivated by the glory of God and not the praise of men. (Ibid, p. 78).
12. Jesus once told His disciples, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work” (John 4:34).

Slide 6**C. THINGS WE CANNOT CHANGE OR UNDERSTAND**

“Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is; for he cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is. For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man? For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow. For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?” (*Ecclesiastes 6:10–12, NASB95*)

Slide 7**1. *We cannot change what God has established.***

“Whatever exists has already been named, and it is known what man is”
(v. 10a).

- a. God established the nature and essence of everything that exists, including people, long ago.
- b. “Light” is “light,” not “darkness” (*Genesis 1:3,4*).
- c. “Day” is “day,” not “night” (*Genesis 1:5*).
- d. These are the names which God gave — they have not changed.
- e. “Man” (*Adam*) is “from the ground” (*adamah*) (*Genesis 2:7*).
- f. This is what we are — we came from the earth and we will return to it (*Genesis 3:19*).
- g. This does not change.

“What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.” (*Ecclesiastes 1:15*)

“I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him.” (*Ecclesiastes 3:14*)

Slide 8**2. It is useless to argue with God about what He has foreordained.**

“He [man] cannot dispute with him who is stronger than he is. For there are many words which increase futility. What then is the advantage to a man?” (*Ecclesiastes 6:10b-11*).

a. It is useless because God who has done it is too strong.**Slide 9****b. The more we argue against God, the less we accomplish (cf. *Ecclesiastes 10:12-14*).**

“Words from the mouth of a wise man are gracious, while the lips of a fool consume him; the beginning of his talking is folly and the end of it is wicked madness. Yet the fool multiplies words. No man knows what will happen, and who can tell him what will come after him?” (*Ecclesiastes 10:12–14, NASB95*)

Slide 10**3. God knows what is best for us (v. 12a).**

“For who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life? He will spend them like a shadow.” (*Ecclesiastes 6:12, NASB95*)

a. God knows far more about us than we do.**b. We are wise if we take the time to listen to what God says (*Proverbs 9:10*).**

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (*Proverbs 9:10, NASB95*)

c. Though Scripture teaches us that our lives are fleeting (*Psalms 103:15; James 4:14*), the apostle John reminds us that those of us who do the

will of God live forever (1 John 2:17).

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4. God knows what is coming next (v. 12b).

“For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?”

(*Ecclesiastes 6:12, NASB95*)

- a. Nobody knows the future except God — it is futile for us to speculate as to what the future holds.
- b. God gives us just enough information to encourage us.
- c. One thing is for sure: Death is coming and each of us need to make the best use of our present opportunities.

Conclusion

1. The ability for you and I to enjoy our lives, no matter how short or long they may be, is God’s gift to us.
2. He longs to give us “wisdom and knowledge and joy” (*Ecclesiastes 2:26a*).
3. The writer of Hebrews said that “it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (*Hebrews 9:27*).
4. Paul told the philosophers in Athens that God “has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed” (*Acts 17:31*).
5. He added that God has “furnished proof to all men” of this fact by “raising Him from the dead” (*Acts 17:31b*).
6. We know that man to be Jesus, our Lord and Savior.
7. Are you ready for that day to come?