

## Ecclesiastes

### Chapter 6

#### **Contentment**

We've looked at seasons that make up the tapestry of our lives in Ch 3.

We've looked at some barriers to joy like oppression, envy, loneliness in Ch. 4.

We've talked about gifts and blessings in Ch. 5

Ecc 5 ended with the teacher talking about recognizing our blessings from God. In Ecc 6, the opposite is discussed. When we are unable to enjoy the blessings we have been given or when we're never satisfied with what we have.

In Ch. 6 we'll focus on contentment. In a way, we touched on this as we discussed accepting the season we are in.

**[Slide 2] Read Ecc. 6:1-2** <sup>1</sup> There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: <sup>2</sup> 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. (p556)

Not everyone can enjoy life for one reason or another, even though one may be wealthy (6:1-2). This problem "weighs heavily on men.."

Recall how in the last few verses of ch 5 the teacher tells us to "to accept their lot and be happy in their toil—this is a gift of God."

Perhaps we can relate – we set a goal we want to achieve; we fall short. Can we be content? (In the teen class we looked at the story of McKayla Maroney the 2012 Olympic gymnast who took home a silver medal after falling on her second trial on the vault; she was expected to score high enough for the gold, and probably would have had she not fallen.)

The ability to enjoy God's blessings is a gift from God, not a right or guarantee. Recall the parable of the rich fool in Lk 12:13-20 - <sup>20</sup> "But God said to him, 'You

fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?"

The teacher ends v3 with the term "a grievous evil", the same language used in Ecc 5:13, I have seen a grievous evil under the sun:

**[Slide 3] Read Ecc 6:3-6. Discuss.**

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> For it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. <sup>5</sup> Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. <sup>6</sup> Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?

"For the secularist, life is a pointless journey to extinction, to which being stillborn is the quickest and easiest route." Recall how Job lamented his birth in Job 3, actually cursing the day of his birth.

Verse 5, "has not seen the sun" in contrast to all that is seen "under the sun".

Verse 6 is an echo of 2:14, "the same fate overtakes them both". He's talking about physical death.

More than double Methuselah's age, it's an ironic exaggeration intended to show "no matter how long". 'Do not all go to the same place?' shows it has nothing to do with longevity.

**[Slide 4]** Recall in 3:17, "I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work." There would be no purpose for judgement if there was no life beyond physical death.

**[Slide 5] Read Ecc 6:7-9**

<sup>7</sup> All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. <sup>8</sup> 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? <sup>9</sup> Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

[Slide 6] Bread alone does not satisfy. John 6:27: "Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." (p891)

For his mouth – both directly and indirectly. Includes earning a living.

[Slide 7] Isaiah 55:2 Why spend money on that which is not bread, and your labor on that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of foods. (p615)

Verse 8 is an interesting one – are these rhetorical questions? Or is the second question an answer to the first? The teacher seems to be asking 2 questions:

- Does the wise man have an advantage in this life?
- Does the poor man have an advantage if he knows how to handle himself? (conducting oneself before someone is to live as so to please him.)

[Slide 8] We see that concept in 1Ki 2:4: that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.' (p280)

Eyes that see and recognize the blessings of God are better than a wandering appetite that can't be satisfied.

[Slide 9] In 1:8, the teacher said that "the eye is not satisfied with seeing,"

In 11:9, the teacher admonishes us to "walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment."

[Slide 10] Rewards of life are:

- V7 - short-lived
- V8 - debatable
- V9 – elusive

[Slide 11] Jesus' words in John 6:26, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill." (p 891) In Jesus' day, people were still seeking to satisfy their physical hunger. There is nothing new under the sun.

In 6:9 we see the last of the 9 times where the teacher uses the phrase “striving after wind. (1:14, 1:17, 2:11, 2:17, 2:26, 4:4, 4:6, 4:16, 6:9)

If you’re using the outline, this ends the section on the futility of work which started in 1:12

**[Slide 12] Read 6:10-12.**

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? <sup>12</sup> 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?

When things happen, the event gets a name. Recall 1:9: What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.

In the ancient world, people recognized that the person who named something or someone was sovereign over it. God decrees the nature and name of all he creates.

This verse serves as a reminder of the limited control we have over our lives. We cannot dispute God.

We tell our kids, “You can accomplish anything you want to.” But that’s simply not true. Still, we can help them determine their gifts and abilities and encourage them.

We can combine our gifts and talents with hard work and achieve much, but there are limits. Not every child can grow up to be a professional football player. Some don’t get to grow up at all – cancer, a car accident, a tragedy that prevents them from even trying to accomplish their goals.

In the grand scheme, we have little control in what we can change, so we should find contentment in the blessings God has given us.

We do not know what’s best for us because we do not know the plans of God.

No amount of words can change these things, they may even add to the futility.

In 6:12, we see the double meaning of “hebel” life is fleeting (few days, shadow) and hard to understand. “who knows?”

[Slide 13] The teacher uses these “Who knows?” questions in several places:

2:19 and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

3:21 Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?

6:12 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?

Expositors debate on whether they are rhetorical.

[Slide 14] What is good for man...?

- Something adequate for every day (the few days of his vain life)
- And which can cope with the futility of the earthly realm (while he lives on this earth)
- And the brevity of man (which he passes as a shadow)

Who knows? God

Who can tell man what will be after him under the sun? Again, God.

The teacher is slamming every door except the door of faith.

[Slide 15] **Discuss: What are some reasons that people are not able to enjoy their blessings or are not satisfied with what they have?** We worry about what will happen when we’re gone, addictive behavior – wanting more, searching for meaning in our possessions, envying others, misunderstanding contentment.

Contentment is more about an attitude of thankfulness (gratitude) toward what you have.

[Slide 16] **Read Phil 4:10-13 (p982)**

<sup>10</sup> I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. <sup>11</sup> Not

that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. <sup>12</sup> I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. <sup>13</sup> I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Paul says he has learned to be content in whatever situation he finds himself.

Contentment is an internal quality rather than an external one.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Jesus Christ empowers him to find contentment in all situations.

**[Slide 17] Discuss: Why is contentment so difficult for us? What can we do to be more at peace with our lives and to truly be content?**

Understand that our blessings are a gift from God, recognize there are different seasons in life, and it's not our job to try to measure up to the standards of the world.