

chasing the wind

The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes

Chapter 6

Life is a shadow

PRIMERS

Ever notice the more possessions we have, the more they begin to own us?

Ever wondered what you will be remembered for when you pass away?

When do our eyes have enough searching or our hands enough doing?

1. WHAT'S GOING ON IN CHAPTER 6?

Solomon continues to observe everything under the sun and the things that weigh heavily on humans. Money, possessions and honor are what man chases in this life, but even this is meaningless. Solomon notices that the enjoyment of life is only a gift of God and it can come from nothing else. Those who search for enjoyment in prosperity are like a man's appetite that is never satisfied. God alone allows a person to enjoy his possessions and ultimately enjoy this life.

2. NOTES ON CHAPTER 6

¹ *I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: ² God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil. ³ A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.*

- **Vs. 1:** "under the sun" refers to everywhere in our broken world. Solomon recognizes that one can have abundance of possessions—all that money can buy—yet lack the power to enjoy them. It's a heavy burden to bear.
- **Vs. 2:** Many people today suffer from this emptiness. Especially in America. They drive shiny cars, have the latest electronic equipment, have multiple forms of instant communication and yet they have a hollowness about them. They are trying to desperately enjoy them, yet their faces have hollowness about them. Their eyes portray an emptiness inside. Solomon continues by explaining the abundance of things can be frustrating when you see a stranger enjoying what you cannot! Can there be anything more irritating than getting what you always wanted only to discover that it has lost its luster? Then passing it on to someone who cannot afford it, yet is having a ball with it. "Why couldn't I enjoy it?"—a grievous evil.
- Chapter 5 is extremely similar to chapter 6 by saying, "Whoever loves money never has enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income." (5:10) So we ask, "Is it evil to search for a greater paying job?" No, as families grow the needs increase and earning more money can help meet those needs for healthy living. But the love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). Is it possible to know Scripture and still serve money rather than God? Yes! Jesus speaks to the Pharisees in Luke 16:13, "**No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.' The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Jesus.**" The Pharisees loved money.
- **Vs. 3:** Solomon is reflecting on the life of a man who has a great deal of possessions, but is dishonored at death. Having money, wealth and fame does not guarantee that you will be honored at your death. Look at *King Jehoiakim* (Jeremiah 22:18-19)!
- **Vs. 3:** Literally "*but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial.*" Jesus speaks of God's ability to take away possessions and honor in Luke 12:16-21, "*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?' This is how it will be for anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.*" God wants to be the caretaker for what is immortal—that is our souls. For God, money and wealth do not compare to the soul. Jesus said, "*What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight*" (Luke 16:15b). Solomon praises a stillborn child who has not yet seen or toiled under the sun.

⁴ *It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded.* ⁵ *Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man-* ⁶ *even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?* ⁷ *All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.* ⁸ *What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?* ⁹ *Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.* ¹⁰ *Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with one who is stronger than he.* ¹¹ *The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?* ¹² *For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?*

- **Vs. 4-5:** The most confusing verse of this chapter. The problem comes with understanding the subject (“it”) of this sentence. Is Solomon referring to the man who loses his possessions to the “stranger” or is he referring to the “stillborn child?” The stillborn child appears to be the subject of this sentence as dies in the womb “*without meaning*” and it ceases life in the darkness of the womb “*it departs in darkness.*” Basically, the man who cannot enjoy his wealth is better off dead—like a stillborn child! The theme of the stillborn child continues in verse 5. The man who dies without honor is worse off than a child who never saw the sun or took a breath. To the man or woman who is dishonored at death, rest is never found. Do you know someone who seemed to have everything the heart desired, yet was restless worrying about the size of his or her gravestone?
- **Vs. 6:** Once again, Solomon makes use of a painfully humorous exaggeration, “*thousand years twice,*” to reveal the power of death. There is no escaping the jaws of death no matter how long you live. God calls us to life and he alone calls us to death. He emphasizes this point, “Do not all go to the same place?” We may live in the upper class of life, but our endpoint is the same as the lower class. Think of the roads we drive on, all share the same roads not matter what car we drive and all reach the same destination no matter what car we drive.
- **Vs. 7:** Pride is also a grievous evil because it is also never satisfied. Oh, how we love to speak of our accomplishments yet even they will pass away! Like money, our efforts and accomplishments are futile. Proverbs 27:20 says, “*Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man.*”
- **Vs. 8:** The same fate that overtakes the fool also overtakes the wise (Eccl. 2:15). Solomon lists a number of things that cannot keep a man from the grips of death; wisdom (v. 8); pride (v. 7); a long life (v. 6); prosperity (v. 4-5); a large family (v. 3); wealth, possessions and honor (v. 2). The conclusion of the whole argument is given, “*What advantage has a wise man over a fool?*” A similar question is asked two verses before when the Teacher asks, “*Do not all go to the same place?*” A theme of the entire book of Ecclesiastes!
- **Vs. 9:** It is better to see the grievous evil that is under the sun and acknowledge it as meaningless than to deliberately chase after the wind. Better to see that human destiny is ultimately fixed in God’s hands and not fret about the past or strive to plot the future.
- **Vs. 10:** We all have our limits! Literally, “*Whatever one is, he has already been named already, for it is known that he is man!*” Ultimately, the Teacher is showing us our dust! God knew everything about us before we were a thought in our mother’s mind. Look at chapter 3 verse 15. Solomon recognizes that there is nothing new under the sun. We marvel at new accomplishments but greater accomplishments will follow. We marvel at athleticism but the athlete’s accomplishments will be forgotten and replaced by a greater athlete. For example, Barry Bonds hit 72 homeruns breaking the single season homerun record and he will likely break the career homerun record also. Babe Ruth’s accomplishments will fade into the wind, but so will Barry Bond’s accomplishments. As humans, limitations drive us to become more but this too is a chasing after the wind.
- **Vs. 11:** Have you ever listened to a filibuster given by a politician on C-SPAN television? If not, you haven’t missed anything. Politicians are known to talk for hours to lure others to sleep and delay the progress of a certain agenda. Just imagine if Jesus would have said to the woman crying at his feet, “Woman, you have sinned and your sins need to be forgiven so why not ask God for forgiveness?” No, with few words Jesus said to her, “*Your sins are forgiven.*” (Luke 7:48) Jesus was poignant with his words. They were personal, direct and carried meaning! His stories had no extra details that did not pertain to the actual point of his message.
- **Vs. 12:** Solomon reminds us of our mortality once again and compares life to a shadow. Only God knows what will happen under the sun after we are gone. Solomon asks his sixth and final question of the chapter leading us to the crowning limitation put on human beings—the inability to know the future. No one knows the future but God and he is not telling—only what he reveals to us in Scripture.

UNDER THE SUN TRUTHS

1. God intentionally creates mystery within our lives to lead us to a relationship with Him.
2. Without God life is a pointless journey to extinction from His Presence.
3. With faith in Christ, our words and efforts can be used to glorify Him!