

All right, shall we open our Bibles this morning to Ecclesiastes 6? As we continue our journey with Solomon, studying the notes that he took from his years in the world, pursuing life "under the sun." Solomon was a king - David's son - grew up in a godly home, and when he became king, the Lord said, "Solomon, what can I give you?" And he said, "Lord, I need wisdom." And God gave him wisdom greater than any man that had ever lived and along with it, riches and honor and power. For many years, Solomon walked with God, and the nation was blessed because of it. But then, later on in his life, he began to marry many different wives from different backgrounds. They turned his heart away from the Lord. And Solomon began this journey to document his quest, really. And he writes it out here in this journal to find life or satisfaction, to find some kind of fulfillment and joy in the world - without God's involvement. He had no restraint - as far as people couldn't stop him from pursuing it. He had no wealth issues. He had more than he could ever have hoped for, and so he went after just, really, everything that interested him. He tried it all. And he runs down every potential path that looks like it's promising.

Ecclesiastes, the preacher, *kohaleth* in Hebrew, the fellow who was out to examine life apart from God. And it is certainly one of the best books that you will ever use in your witnessing to others because Solomon, somewhere in this book, will cover what the person you're sharing with is going through at the moment - what he's pursuing, what matters to him, and so you can lay out for him what Solomon did. He tried everything. He owned things, he made things, he named things, he created things, he possessed things, he went after experiences of pleasure and wine and women and song - without restraint - everything that money could buy and power could supply. And then he writes down here his expectations - what he hoped to find; and then what he found, in longhand, so you and I don't miss what he is learning in the process because he'll tell us that real life is found with God. And there are a lot of disappointing highways that you can travel down - a lot of dead end streets.

This morning, in these twelve verses of chapter 6, Solomon gives to us some more insights about life "under the sun." And I keep repeating that because these are his observations from a life separated from God. And, as he writes these down, he

comes to pretty depressing conclusions. Yet because of the way he writes them, we can then easily look to see how God's Word and our relationship with him would have helped him to avoid this empty life that he invariably finds everywhere he looks.

So, we'll give you three points to remember this morning. It'll be easy, right? Verse 1, he finds wealth, without joy, in the world. In fact, he'll say it's common to man. He will find long life without satisfaction. That's his second point. And he will find people working without fulfillment, and in the end, it leaves them with more questions than answers. But fortunately, as believers we have the answers. He just doesn't because he's out there on his own.

So verse 1, "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." Well, "under the sun," he's right. With God, things are different. Now you will notice, as we go through, that "under the sun" is found in verse 1; vanity and an evil affliction is found in verse 2; vanity is found again in verse 9 along with that other poetic phrase he uses a lot - a "grasping for the wind;" and then he'll talk about a vain life in verse 12. So, he's pretty discouraged, you know? He's not finding life "under the sun" to be too good.

Well he starts off here, notice, with wealth without joy. He describes this man - that he has seen in the world. And first of all, he says this is common in the world. It's an evil thing, it's a vain thing, it's an empty thing, but it's a common thing. There are many in the world who have wealth, but they have no joy. Notice that God gave to this individual - in his example - his riches and wealth and honor. He doesn't acknowledge it because he doesn't know God, so all he has is the world. But he forgets that everything we have, God gives us. God helps, and God blesses, and He's the source of all of those blessings. But this man, who has done so well in the world, doesn't acknowledge God. The word "riches" usually, in the Bible, means just that - money, stuff, power. But the word "wealth" is always a word that speaks about accumulated riches or things that are laid up in reserve. And the word "honor" here is tied directly to the wealth. It is a status that he has been given in the world because he has so much abundance. He has this overwhelming kind of endless wealth. So Solomon references a life that has more than it can ever use. He uses the word, "he lacks nothing for himself of all that he desires." This isn't a

rich man; this is a filthy rich man. This is a guy who has a strong asset base, an unlimited cache, and he's renowned for his great holdings. He's famous for his wealth. If I was to say to you, "Name some famous people that are famous for their wealth," you'd immediately come up with some names. Folks that are often held in high esteem or maybe in disregard, but they live lives that only others can dream about. And people want to live vicariously. "What would I do with an unlimited bank account?" And so, he has gotten honor besides all of the world's goods that he could gather. But Solomon, in looking and observing at life, sees something very odd because he says, "Here is a man who has so much and lacks nothing, and there is a suspicious lack of joy in his life." It isn't a joy to have all of that he has. He owns it all, he has it all, but finds no joy in it all. He describes him this way, "God does not give him the power to eat of it." The blessings that each of us has come from the Lord - whether we acknowledge them or not. But until we acknowledge Him, the blessings of God won't satisfy. They won't permanently, they won't deeply, they won't really, they won't completely satisfy your life because, having only a worldly view of things, those things that you gather are not enough to make you joyful.

You know, with all of our woes in this country, as of the moment, we are still one of the wealthiest nations on the planet. The question is - are we happier because of it? Often the more wealth you have, the more wants you acquire. The things that you never thought you need, you all of a sudden need now. Look, treat yourself to a new iPhone. You've always wanted one, so get one. But now what? Well, now you're going to need a cover for it. You don't want to scratch it. And you're going to have to get an extra charger - one for the car, one for the house, one for work - in fact you're going to need three. And then you need some money in your Apple account because those apps - you can't really use an iPhone without those apps. Oh, and some insurance - because if you lose or break this sucker, that's hundreds of dollars. You can't have that. You need to have it insured. Oh, and then, I need a Chat Minute Plan - plan to do a lot of chatting. And all of a sudden that phone becomes a world of hurt, you know? It's getting you coming, it's getting you going.

I was amazed this week, and someone had mentioned it so I went and looked it up, that most online shopping sites now have wish list folders. Didn't realize this. (Laughing) This isn't stuff I can buy now, but it's stuff I'm gonna get later. And you can just leave them in there for months on end. Every time you, "Oh, there it is. I know I need that, don't I?!" (Laughing) Are we really happier? A hundred years ago, the average American wish list contained 40 items. As described by an

average American, this is what we need. A survey done last year found most Americans had a wish list of over 800 items. And we've redefined need - flat screen TV. "I need one." (Laughing) Do you really? Okay. "I need one." And we find ourselves living in a culture where everything today competes for your money. So they all want you to be interested in what they have to offer. So now it's not enough to just go buy it. Now you want to be on the list for the release day - "It's coming. You gotta get on the list. You may not get one if you're not on the list!" And they develop this first to get it, first to order, gotta buy it, gotta have it.

And here's Solomon. He's a man of tremendous wealth. In fact, wealthier than anyone who was alive, and maybe this is more personal than observational for him, though he usually tells us. But he says, "Look, when it comes to life under the sun, I see a lot of people that are extremely wealthy - in a worldly sense - but there's no joy from it. They have no power to eat of it. In fact, a foreigner consumes it." Because this is poetic, a foreign power could take your kingdom, but a foreign invader could steal your wealth. The taxes could eat you alive. The lawsuits could take it from you. Maybe sickness kind of eats up the dollars you've saved. Or maybe Solomon's just simply referring to the worry that people tend to surround themselves with over losing it, or the selfishness about keeping it, or the desire for more of it. And it all steals your joy. The bottom line is - in the world, "under the sun," common to man, you will find great gain without any joy. It's just the way the world is. You can't find joy in it. That's the way the world works. And often, the most wealthy and successful men are the most unhappy. Their faces, their eyes, their demeanor, betray their success. Carnegie wrote, years ago, "Most multimillionaires never smile." Now, I don't know too many multimillionaires, so I don't know, but he hung around with a lot of them. The happiest people on earth find their joy in things other than wealth - the things that God gives, the love of a spouse, the nursing mother with her child. And the greatest, and the most lasting joy, is the joy that God gives to those who know Him - that whether wealth comes or it doesn't, you have exceeding joy. You know what God's plans are for your life, you know what your future holds, you know what God's promises are to you - day in and day out. You are filled, or you should be filled, with joy. It should be your strength. It should be. But you see, in the world, though the blessings come from God, no one recognizes Him as God, and so those things that He gives are not satisfying. It's the Giver that satisfies, and it is only the saint who recognizes that God gives. And so we live for Him. We win souls for Christ. We seek to please Him. And my life is filled with joy. And then if money comes, David, "Don't

put your heart in them" (Psalm 62:10). But if it doesn't, that's fine. Praise the Lord. My joy is tied to Him.

I heard a story once - of an old, cranky, wealthy man who had a really bad attitude, and he knew he had a bad attitude, because everyone told him (Laughing). So he went to this rabbi that lived a fairly simple life, and he said, "Look, I'd like you to help me. I don't know what my problem is here." The rabbi took him to a window, and he said, "What do you see?" And he said, "Well, I see women shopping and kids playing in a park and guys driving up and down the street and families walking to the store." And he said, "Great." He took him inside, and he set him in front of a mirror, and he said, "What do you see now?" And he said, "I just see me." He says, "You know, the mirror and the window are both made of glass, but the mirror has a little something added to it - a little silver. With a little silver, all you see is you. It's a reflection. It's what your money has done to you, man. It's tied you up in you."

It happens to a lot of people. Riches make you self-consumed. They are riches without joy. And Solomon says - he says they're evil (verse 1), they're "under the sun" (verse 2), and they're commonplace there. This is not an isolated incident. And that is that folks who, in the world without God, just gain - there's no joy for the owner of that which he gains. And Solomon, in verse 2, literally says what he's been saying for five chapters - joy isn't found in riches or wealth or honor. Joy is found in knowing God. And the grandest worldly blessing from God will not satisfy a person who lives his life "under the sun." There's not going to be enough there to ever bring you to that point of joy.

One of the great themes of this book is that God richly gives us everything to enjoy, but only as we know Him are His gifts worth having, and they are then used in a way that is proper, and it won't take you down. It won't take you away from Him. It'll just draw you closer to Him. To live knowing God is to find real joy. And joy, in the Bible, is never found by direct pursuit. You never go, "Today, I'm going to be joyful!" It is always found through a pursuit of God, and it becomes a by-product of seeking Him and knowing Him. And the more I know, the more joyful I am. You were created for that, right? Revelation 4:11 - you were created for God's own pleasure. So, to the extent that you please God with your life, you'll be satisfied. To the extent that you'll seek to please yourself, you will not. And the sooner you discover that, the sooner your joy will be full. So, commonplace, in the

world, "under the sun," evil as can be - I see, in life, a vanity and an evil affliction - wealth without joy.

Secondly, he points out that there are many in the world - again, commonplace is the application, verse 2, all that follows - common to man, evil in the world, long life without satisfaction. Verse 3, "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?"

Now, Solomon continues along the same lines of having but not enjoying, but this time he turns to the hypothetical case - a typical poetic practice - of a man who lived a very prolific life. And in his hyperbole, he imagines a man that has a hundred children and lives two thousand years. Right? A thousand years, twice. By the way, hyperbole in poetry always means to exaggerate something to create an emphasis. Right? You make it so ridiculous that the truth becomes obvious. That's what hyperbole does. So Solomon does that here. Rather than wealth without joy, Solomon now applies what he is concluding to what he sees in the world of those who live years and years and years in this life but are never really satisfied. The observation is found in verse 3. The despair that he senses from his observation leads him to make that very sad pronouncement in the last few verses here, 3-6 anyway, and his argument is, "Well, since everyone's gonna die anyway, it's probably better to die without having had it than to live with it all your life and not be satisfied with it - since you're all going to end up dead." That's his point.

The understanding of the ancient world was that the more children you had, the more God had blessed you. Common understanding. And the idea was that a long and very fruitful life, and a prosperous life in what really matters - not wealth but in family and progeny and descendants and influence and children and grandchildren and more - if you can live that kind of life - even if you had a hundred kids and lived two thousand years - if you still weren't satisfied with that life, it probably is better that you were never born at all. Because that's an evil that is common to man that he sees in the world - folks that are so extremely blessed by God but are not satisfied with His blessings or thankful for them.

A study done last month said that one out of every three people alive in the US today will live to be one hundred years old. With our wealth of information about nutrition and exercise and better medical care, the idea of planning for your retirement years is becoming more and more difficult. Paramount today. Life is getting longer, but are we better off? I guess that'd be the question. In 1900, by the way, the US citizen's average life span was 47 years old. Today it's 78.6, I believe.

Solomon's observation here is that living long doesn't imply living well. And he describes the dilemma he finds with a couple of important words. In his hyperbolic illustration, he stretches a man's blessing to one hundred children - not likely from anyone - and living two thousand years. Again, the bottom line is - with all of that benefit still, we read, his soul is not *saba*. *Saba* is a word - it's translated "satisfied" here. It literally means "to be able to say I'm full." In other words, if you can never get to the point in your life where you can say to the Lord, "I have enough, I am overwhelmed with Your goodness." Though you have a hundred kids and a two-thousand-year life, if you're not satisfied, you never come to that place of satisfaction if you don't recognize - notice God's goodness, again, is there. *Towb* means "benefit". It's translated goodness, here, bounty. Like the wealthy in our previous example, this man also doesn't recognize God's blessing upon his life - not in a financial sense but in a relational sense. It doesn't matter how long he lives or how many kids he has, if he's not satisfied, if his soul is not satisfied with the overwhelming blessing of God, it probably would have been just as good for him had he never been born. You see, Solomon says it's not really quantity that determines satisfaction - but thankfulness, gratefulness, an awareness of the goodness of God, that you might enjoy what you've been given. It's not a worldly quality to be thankful. That's not at all found in the world. Oh, it's surface thanks, but then it's mixed in with need and want and more.

David said of riches in Psalm 62:10, "If riches increase, do not set your heart on them." Why? Because you're satisfied with God. David wrote in Psalm 100:4, "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name." We're a blessed people, but the only folks who know that are the people who belong to Him. In the world, no matter how blessed you are, there's always a dissatisfaction, isn't there? You just can't be satisfied. It's just that restlessness that sin brings. Paul said to the Colossians in chapter 3:15, "let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful." Be thankful. We're not good at being

thankful, but the world knows nothing about it. When Job was writing in chapter 3:1 about the difficulty he had faced in losing his children and having to figure out how the goodness of God figured into all of that, he said out loud, in great frustration, "Cursed is the day that I was born. I wish it had never taken place." Solomon looks at a man who has everything in life and says, "That man would probably be better off not being born than to live through all of that and not be satisfied." Stillborn children in Old Testament cultures were oftentimes unnamed, and the practice was supported by the thought that if you didn't give a name to a child that you'd lost, maybe you'd get over the grief a little quicker. So, at the end of verse 4, you read there that his "name is covered with darkness." Or in other words, no one knew what it was. But it's a good comparison.

Now Solomon, because he is living in the world, under the world, looking at the world without, really, an awareness of God's presence, at least not always, wrongly concludes in verse 6 that everyone ends up in one place. Now he's right - everyone ends up in the grave, but that's where the comparison stops. That's where it stops. We should all sidestep the aches and the pains and the family quarrels and the difficulty of relationships if we're not satisfied with them - because everyone ends up at a funeral. Better to avoid it than to live at all and not be satisfied. I think it was Thomas Jefferson who wrote one time, "My only fear is that I live too long." Yet we know as God's people that the solution to this is that we can be satisfied. The goodness of God is there. It's just that those in the world don't see it. He has a long life, he has lots of kids, he has great influence, he's got a progeny. But he doesn't notice. He isn't thankful. So he's just continually complaining, dissatisfied.

We live in a world of complainers, don't we? We're forever unhappy and dissatisfied with the goodness of God which we fail to recognize until we come to know Him. We run from one want to the next want to the next wish list, and we look a whole lot like the world - not at all like the God that we serve. We hear people talk about rights and what we deserve, and let me just say to you - you don't want what you deserve. And we've forgotten how to be thankful. But only the church can be. The world won't be. That's the way it works. Commonplace, evil, vanity - that's what Solomon saw. If you live your entire life with this kind of outlook, you'll end your life with great regret. You'll forever be saying, "Oh, I should have married that person, and I should have taken that job, and I should have moved to that state, and what was I doing not buying that stock, and I should have followed my heart." And oh, it's all looking back with regret. But if we're

thankful, then we're satisfied. Thanksgiving leads to satisfaction. But in the world, you can never find it. Jesus said of the ten lepers (Luke 17:17), when the one came back, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine" that they don't come to give thanks? And to the thankful one, He said in verse 19, "Your faith has made you well." The other nine fall right into Solomon's example. "I want to get, get, get, but I'm still not satisfied nor am I thankful." "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name! And forget not all His benefits" (Psalm 103:1-2). It's different than hearing people pray, "Give me, bless me, I need, I gotta have, I want" with very little genuine thanksgiving. The solution for us is not to look around regrettably but to look around thankfully. But that's not what you'll find in the world. Solomon says that here. Lives two thousand years, has a hundred kids - his soul's not satisfied with God's goodness. It can't be.

Look, you should try this for a week. Get up in the morning, and make a list of what you're thankful for. Don't make a list of what you need. Make a list of what you have. Thanksgiving was instituted in our country at a time when we were digging seven graves for every one house that we were building. It was a terrible time in the nation's history - as far as being thankful. We could have found better years to institute a Thanksgiving Day, but we didn't. Thanksgiving will bring satisfaction, even as serving Jesus will bring great joy.

Thirdly, verse 7, there is a work in the world that he finds to be commonplace that doesn't satisfy or fulfill us. "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" (or emptiness) "and grasping for the wind" (it's an impossibility). Now, notice in verse 7 that Solomon, in observing life, says that there those who work solely for the benefit of their mouth. "All labor of man is for his mouth." He's not diverted from that, he gives it his all. "I want to singularly satisfy my needs," and yet Solomon says, "When he is all done giving it his all, his soul is still not satisfied." "You've done it all, but your work doesn't fulfill." And Solomon in verse 8, here, compares the extremely wealthy with the plight of the poor who have to live hand-to-mouth and check-to-check and says, "Neither appetite, really, is satisfied. The poor man may have gotten really good at social skills to be able to make ends meet, but he still finds no satisfaction." He grants in verse 9 that a life that is satisfied with what it sees is far better than a life that constantly is desiring things that are never satisfied. This is the biblical "a bird in the hand" proverb, right? But in reality, in the end,

both of them are empty and impossible. Life "under the sun" drives man, in his labor, to no sense of fulfillment, no sense of accomplishment, no sense of satisfaction at all. He has a wandering desire - where there's always something missing and something more and something else that I need. And I'll give you the solution. The solution is - don't work so hard for your mouth. Work harder for your soul. Right? Jesus said in Matthew 6:33, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." We're working way too hard in the wrong place. But that's the way the world works. That's what Solomon sees in the world. Folks that just - "I gotta have, I gotta work harder, I'm staying late, I'm working overtime, I'm getting more, I'm spending more, I gotta have it, I've gotta have more and more and more. I'm never satisfied. I'm never filled. I have no joy. I have no sense of satisfaction. I have no sense, in my labor, of fulfillment." That's the way the world works.

Front page news today is carrying the debates about health care. We should probably be more concerned with our soul care. How's your soul doing? Are you working it out? Are you feeding it well? Are you caring for it properly? Because your soul will live forever. Your mouth won't.

Well finally, in verses 10-12, Solomon is then left with more questions than answers - at least looking at life "under the sun." He says in verse 10, "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." So, his final comment was that those who need to know all of the answers and live by their own understanding can't find any satisfaction either because there're a lot of things they don't know. You know what's cool about being a Christian is that I don't have all the answers, but I know the One who does. And someone who wants to live with, constantly, every answer, finds himself living without faith. And faith pleases God. So, I am forced to not only be told a lot of things to believe, but a lot of things I just have to leave with the Lord. I live on promises, not always on explanations. God doesn't always explain Himself. So, he says here in verse 10, "We are all the same in that regard. No man can find satisfaction in this life. You won't find it in wealth, you won't find it in work, you won't find it in long life, you won't find it in wisdom." God wants us to trust Him. So that's really what we should do. We should trust Him. We should believe in Him. We should know Him. Now Solomon cynically writes here at the end of verse 10, "Why oppose Him or disagree with Him? We can't win anyway." But that's a real negative approach, isn't it? Accept life as it is, you know? Forget about worry or argue - it doesn't work. Just resign yourself to the inevitable. But

that's negative. God would say to you, "Trust Me. I've got good things in store. I have great plans for you. My plans are good and not evil. They're intended to give you an expected end." All things work together for good. That's not so fatalistic, is it? That's much more hopeful. God knows what I need, so I should trust Him. Freedom from the will of God is bondage, not life. The more I know His will, the better off I am.

Verse 11 says, "Since there are many things that increase vanity, how is man the better?" It's a weird translation. Here's what the NIV writes, "The more words, the less the meaning. How does that profit anyone?" That's closer, I think, to the actual wording. The bottom line is - what good does all of our talking do, anyway, at this point? It's not enough to just talk.

Well then, in verse 12, Solomon ends with two questions. "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?" Who knows what's best for us? Who knows what's coming after us? And the answer is very simple - God knows. So in the world, again, you're stuck. There's a thousand people who'll tell you what's coming next and what's best for you, and they'll all be wrong, won't they? Read any magazine. They're always filled with advice columns. "Here's what you gotta do. Here's what you gotta do with your time, with your health, with your money." Really? And then I can live to be one hundred. Okay, then what? What do I do at 101? God knows. You want joy in your life? Seek Him. You want to be satisfied with all that He has given you? Be thankful to Him. You want your work to matter? Serve Him. It'll fulfill your life. And you won't have questions about life. You'll have answers. You have a hope. The world can struggle. You won't. He is your joy, He is your length of days, He is the fulfillment of the cry of your heart, He will satisfy the soul and answer you of the most difficult questions in life.

I heard a story a while back of a book collector who had a friend who had been flown out back East to clean out his parents' ancestral home. And he had run across an old Bible, and he called his friend, and he said, "You know, I was cleaning out the house yesterday, and I thought of you, and I forgot that you collect books. I should have called you." And he said, "What did you do?" He said, "I found this old Bible in the attic. It was old. Had a bunch of junk all over. Had some German name on the front - Gutenberg or something. I threw it away." He said, "Pal! In 1456, the Gutenberg was the first printed Bible ever. There were only 265 copies

made. A full copy found today would sell for \$150 million. And one page from that book would have sold for \$30,000." And the friend said to him, "Oh, not the one I had. It was all scribbled on and written over by some guy named Martin Luther."
(Laughing)

And I thought, well, it's kind of what we do, right? We throw away things of true value while we cling to those things that will never satisfy us. We've got to hang on to Jesus. We need to hang onto the Lord. Our life has got to be lived for Him because Solomon, with all of his wisdom, saw a wealth in the world without any joy. No ability to even enjoy what God had given. Found no fulfillment, no satisfaction in a long life because there was always that drive to get more rather than to say, "I'm full! God, I'm so full! I have enough." And to go to work each day - serving Him. Oh, that's fulfillment. That's where you'll find your greatest satisfaction. Feed the soul, not the mouth. The mouth will find a way to eat all on its own.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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