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Climbing The Ladder To Neverland

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Ecclesiastes 6:1-12



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What! Yeah, can I get a tow?

Sure. What's your location?

Where did my money go? Never mind.

So you don't need help?

It's a joy to be gathered with you guys this morning digitally, and to be opening the word together with you. I'm Bryan, one of the pastors on staff here, and I get the joy of opening up Ecclesiastes 6 with you guys this morning. But before we do, I want to start today by asking you a question. Are you happy with your current state of life? What brings you the greatest joy and satisfaction? This weekend, we celebrate July the fourth and the independence of our country. And these words were penned in the declaration of independence. We hold these truths to be self evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed with certain unalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The pursuit of happiness, part of what drove the people who founded our country to step out and say, "These are the things that we long for." So are you truly happy?

A recent study that has been done even since the pandemic has kind of rocked our world says that within our own country's borders, over a third of the population of our adults are suffering significantly from some signs of anxiety and depression. And yet we live in a country who had at its core one of the ideas of what we're doing is to pursue our contentment. Contentment in life can be like a road trip with a destination that's never ending. And if you have children, then it's filled with the refrain, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" Or even worse than a road trip that never ends, contentment can play gas like a mirage in the desert. It beckons you forward and it promises something satisfying only to find it disappear as you approach it. It will always stay just out of reach.

But here's the truth. We were made to be satisfied. You and I, we were made to find contentment. Paul Tripp, a modern author, a theologian, and pastor said these words in a book that he wrote, "We were placed on this earth to be a part of something bigger than the narrow borders of our own survival and our own little definition of happiness." God made you to long for something more and to find contentment in that. And if there's anything today that I would want you to walk away from Ecclesiastes 6 understanding it's really this, that true and lasting contentment is only found through God and in Him. And this is really at the heartbeat of Psalm 16 when the Psalmist says, "You make known to me the path of life and in your presence there is fullness of joy. And at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

That Psalm is full of language of satisfaction and contentment. And yet we know that from a scriptural perspective, it's only found in one place. And that's why Paul would write in Colossians 1:16-17. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together." This

idea of contentment is at the core of Ecclesiastes 6. And to be completely honest, it's really at the core of all of the book of Ecclesiastes. Solomon, the third King of Israel... And he had more of just about everything in life that you could possibly want. More of about everything in life that you could imagine getting. And he realized that all of his possessions, and all of his food, and all of his money, and all of his servants, and all of his wives, and even all of his wisdom did not leave him satisfied.

And he wrote Ecclesiastes, born out of that reality. And as pastor Bryan mentioned last week, God in His providence has preserved Solomon's words for us, not so that we would imitate his life, but so that we would learn his lesson. And this morning, because of where we stand in history by God's grace, we can read the book of Ecclesiastes through the lens of the cross, which gives us ultimate meaning. And before we jump into chapter six, let's pray.

Father, I ask you even now to help us to see the words that Solomon penned to know the truth that is found in them, the reality of life under the sun. But God, my prayer is that we wouldn't get lost in the brokenness of the world, but that we would lift our eyes up and see that there is hope because of what you've done for us in Christ. And in these next few minutes, God, would you clear our hearts and our minds so that we can hear you clearly and help us to look at your word, and to understand, and to believe, and to trust. And we'll give you the praise for it. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Ecclesiastes 6, Solomon starts with these words, "There is an evil that I have seen under the sun and it lies heavy on mankind." Now, Solomon says, "There's an evil that I see in the world." And so it ought to beg us to ask the question, what is this evil that Solomon sees? And when we read the rest of Ecclesiastes, what we're going to find out is this, this evil is actually being discontent. It's the lack of contentment in this world. And we see this phrase that comes over and over again, under the sun. And really what we've seen as we walked through this is that, under the sun really means that all there is to life is all there is to life. That all we see is all there is. And Solomon says that life is plagued with that.

And there are four things that I want us to consider. And we're going to see in the first nine verses that really show us how discontentment rules our hearts. And the first is simply this. Discontentment rules our hearts when we seek fulfillment from the things of this world. Solomon writes here in Ecclesiastes 6:2. "To a man whom God gives wealth, and possessions, and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity and it is a grievous evil."

I want to show you what Solomon is doing here and why I think that discontentment resides when we seek fulfillment from things of this world. Solomon says, look, this is the blessing of life, wealth, and possessions, and honor. And yet this man... Here's the key, he lacks nothing of all that he desires. Do you get that? Everything that this man wants in life is captured in these three things. They're not bad things. But we know that in fact, Solomon says, God gives these things. So they can't be bad because we know from his word that every good and perfect gift comes down from His hand. And so these are good gifts, but it's all that this man

desires. What is it about our fallenness that pushes us to love the created things more than the creator, to love the gift more than the giver, or to think that the gift is greater than the one who gave it?

You all have heard stories of the wealthy man, whoever he may be, who works and toils to give his family all the good gifts that he can. He labors and sweats to buy them the best things, and send them to the best schools, and send them on the best vacations. But they all come at the expense of spending quality time or any time at all with his kids. And later in life, the child laments, “I didn’t want your stuff. I wanted you.”

Presence. Never fully take the place of presence being there. There are bad substitute for affection, attention, and the time of the giver. And at the core of what Solomon is saying here is that the man who has all of these good things, these are all of the things that he desires. His heart thinks that it’s going to find his satisfaction in these things. And yet there’s a misplaced value. We seek and we desire the wrong treasure. It’s why Jesus would say in Matthew 6, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on the earth. Wealth, possessions, and honor where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

What you treasure will get your affection. What you treasure will get your best. It’ll get your best effort, your most effort, your best time, your most time, your best attention and your most attention. But before we move past this idea that discontentment rules our hearts when we seek fulfillment from things of this world, I want to show you something else that Solomon says here that I think we need to unpack. And he says, “A man to whom God gives wealth, and possessions, and honor so that he lacks nothing of all he desires, yet God does not give him the power to enjoy them.” God does not give him the power to enjoy them.

Now, it seems like Solomon is saying, in these words, that God prevents the man from enjoying the gifts. If this is true, then why? I think there may be two reasons why, but I want you to consider something. Have you ever thought that discontentment is God’s loving way of showing us that there’s something more. When the things that you are pursuing fail to produce the satisfaction that you desire, it’s an opportunity to shift your attention to the greater. Enjoyment of God’s good gifts is in itself a gift from God. We saw that last week in chapter five, but it comes from a right perspective. And what is this perspective that it comes from? The more we know God, and the more we understand and experience His love, the more this love shapes how we view all of life. And I think this is at the core of what the Psalmist writes in Psalm 73, when he says, “Whom have I in heaven but you. And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”

He says, there’s nothing on this earth that I desire before you. Now, before we think this is a really righteous man, you should back up and read the whole of Psalm 73. And it’s remarkable that this Psalm even mirrors some of what we see at work here in Ecclesiastes. The Psalmist starts. And he says, “Look, I looked at the world and I saw how those who do not know God were prospering. And everything that they have was great.

And the more that I saw it, the more perplexed I was. And I didn't understand why those who were righteous, himself included, they didn't see good things as he saw the world, the world's definition of good." And he got angry and upset, even to the point that he despaired. And then he says, he came into the presence of God. And when he came into the presence of God, then he understood. And after coming into the presence of God, he pens these words, "There's nothing on earth that I desire besides you."

When our hearts' affections are wrapped up in the things of this world, then we tend to compare our life and our stuff with others around us, which is really what we see happen. The second thing that I think is true of discontentment, discontentment rules are hard when we seek fulfillment from the things of this world, but then when we envy what others have. And this is what Solomon says here in Ecclesiastes 6:2. "A man who God gives wealth, and possession, and honor so that he lacks nothing of all he desires and yet God does not give him the power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity and a grievous evil."

When Solomon says, "But a stranger enjoys them," what is he telling us? I think there's two possible ways to see this as being true in light of what Solomon writes. And perhaps the first is this, that a man who works himself to the bone only to have others enjoy the fruit of his labor. He can't because he has to stay on the wheel of production to keep the cycle going. Maybe this is what he had in mind when he stated in chapter two, verse 18, "I hate my toil, in which I toiled under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me." One who gets to enjoy what he's reaped, or maybe he dies and he has to leave it and he enjoys none of those things. And that's one way that it's possible that a stranger might enjoy them. But the other is this, perhaps the man in chapter six is actually looking back at the man in chapter five.

At the end of chapter five last week, we saw a man who has the same things. In fact, Solomon writes in verse 19 of chapter five these words. "Everyone also to whom God has given wealth, and possession..." similar language, "and the power to enjoy them and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil - this is the gift of God." And as we roll into chapter six, maybe Solomon is looking back and he's seeing the man who had those things and he had enjoyment of them. And now here's a man who has those things, but he doesn't enjoy them. Envy, in its core, is a feeling of discontent or resentful longing that it's produced by focusing on what somebody else has.

Even if we have something similar, sometimes it's focused not on just what they have, like the physical thing, but the reality that they get to enjoy it differently than we do. And really at the core of this, it's driven by our lack of satisfaction in what we have, which is the third thing that I think that we see here in Ecclesiastes 6. Disappointment rules our heart when we aren't satisfied with what we have. Solomon writes it this way. "If a man and fathers a hundred children and lives many years so that the days of his life are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things and he also has no burial, then I say a stillborn child is better off than he."

And I want to take a few minutes to walk through some of the things in this verse that we might miss if we don't understand something about Hebrew culture, children, long life, and burial. In the Israel cultural economy, children and long life were both thought to be blessings from the Lord. You see him say this here, a hundred children and he lives many years. And so children and long life were proof of God's pleasure resting on someone and in turn proof of their righteousness. We see this truth in Psalm 1:27, when it's penned, "Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is a man who fills his quiver with them!"

And in Ecclesiastes 6, this guy has a hundred children. Think of the innumerable blessing that rests on this man. And children were a blessing, but also long life was a blessing. And Solomon himself penned in Proverbs 10:27, the fear of the Lord prolongs life. There's something about wisdom and fear of the Lord that gives long life but the years of the wicked will be short. And if we don't understand that children in long life are considered blessings from God, then we miss the heartbeat of what he's saying here. But Solomon, in this passage in Ecclesiastes, he says, "If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things and he has no burial..."

And this is the other thing that I want to point out, he has no burial. What Solomon is saying here, burial in the Hebrew culture was a means of honoring people. And if this man has lived with lots of children and long years, but he gets to the end of his life and he has squandered it in such a way that his own family doesn't honor him with burial because he's lacked satisfaction in life, he's disconnected from the blessing in a way that it leads him to where he has no burial, no honor, because Solomon says wealth, possessions, and honor, then this is vanity, is ultimately what he's telling us.

And Solomon then goes on and he makes a striking comparison. And I want to walk through this comparison. At the end of that verse, Solomon said, "If a man has all of these things, but he has no satisfaction with life's good things and he has no burial, then I say a stillborn child is better off than he." And he goes on to say, "For it comes in vanity, the child does. And he goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered. And moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything, and yet it finds rest rather than he."

Solomon is not meaning to show insensitivity toward the loss of a child, far from it. Both are tragedies. The loss of a child is a remarkable tragedy. Solomon's point in this comparison is to say that the man who is dissatisfied is actually worse off than a child who was never born. Because that child doesn't experience discontentment in life and it finds rest while the man who lives dissatisfied does not. And this is a continual refrain throughout all of Ecclesiastes. The end of life is the same for all who are in it, regardless of effort or gain, which is why he would say in verse six, "Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good thing, do not all go to the same place." The end of all is ultimately the same one. One life lived with discontent and the other shortened.

To live a life without satisfaction in the things that we've been given gives discontentment the advantage. When we aren't satisfied, in the end we want more, which is the fourth thing that I think we see in these first nine verses. Discontentment rules our hearts when we want more. And the way that Solomon says this is, starting with verse seven, "All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. 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?" He says, "All of the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied." And then he goes on to say, this man, the difference here in the wise man over the fool and then the poor man in comparison to one who's wealthy is this, both at the end of the day are hungry.

The toil of man is for his mouth yet his appetite is not satisfied. The wise man in his wisdom at the end of the day, tomorrow, even if he eats today, he'll be hungry. And the poor man who knows how to conduct himself, how to live life and to scarp to get by, he may eat a meager mill today, but guess what? Tomorrow he will be hungry. So both work to the same end. And then he goes on to say in verse nine, "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this is also vanity and is striving after the wind."

And Solomon is saying, it's better to have what you hold before you than to long for what is out there that you don't have, to want more. All of this. All of this is really to say that discontentment finds us when we ignore the presence and the providence of God and we live as if there is... that all there is to life is really all there is to life. If we live as if everything under the sun is our only hope of any good that we could have.

And this is why discontentment accompanies life under the sun. We live in a broken world that is going to mar our hearts in a way that causes us to have discontentment. And so what do we do? Well, there is hope. God has given us the capacity for contentment and the key to enjoy it. Now last week, Bryan used an example of peaches and a can opener. I'm going to twist it a little bit and I'm going to show you the image of a car and a key. We've been given both the good gift and the key to enjoy it. But if we have one without the other, then what is the point? And this is really at the core of this idea of discontentment and contentment and why I think that the second thing... my main point that I want to have you guys look with me here in Ecclesiastes 6 with is this, that contentment comes from trusting God. This is the key. Contentment comes from trusting in God.

In these last three verses in Ecclesiastes 6, this is where we see this play out and this truth rise to the top. There are a lot of things that we could say here. But I really want to point out three things in this final verse that I think focus on what Solomon is saying in them. And the first is this. If contentment comes from trusting in God, trust that leads to contentment believes that God is sovereign. And when we say God is sovereign, what we mean is that he is in control. That He has authority over all of life. And where we see this in this particular passage is in verse 10. Solomon says, "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 that is stronger than he." When he says here, what has come to be known has already been named, this idea of named is this idea of authority. Whoever names something has authority over it. And this is the reality of life.

And Solomon is alluding to the fact that God is the one who is in control. We really see this in Psalm 139 in verse 16, when David says, “God, You saw my unformed substance. And in Your book were written every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.” “Before I drew my first breath, God,” David says, “God, you knew every day that I would have. You have authority.” And contentment comes when we believe God has authority. And yet there’s more than simply authority because we could believe God has authority, but believe that He doesn’t know how to wield it well like a ruler who is strong, but He’s unjust and that’s not the case either.

And the second thing that I think is true of contentment that is attached to trust is that trust that leads to contentment believes that God is wise. It doesn’t just believe God is sovereign but it believes that God is wise. And where we see this in this text is in verse 11. And Solomon writes of wisdom here in verse 11. And I want to see if I can help you to draw this out. The word Solomon uses is this, “The more words, the more vanity. What is it advantage to man?” And what Solomon is really saying is... you might be saying, “Where’s wisdom in this?” Well, what Solomon is saying is that when we contend with the Lord who is wise, we’re just throwing words up in the air. When we argue with the one who is sovereign and in control, then it’s vanity.

And what advantage is it to man if God is, in fact, in control of all of life? Then why would we do this? God’s wisdom tells us that He knows better than us how we ought to live our lives. But this is really at the core of our struggle with God often, is that we’re not sure if that’s true. And yet what the scripture tells us is that it is. Solomon says it’s fruitless to argue with God. It only produces words. And we don’t operate with the same world view that God does. And yet Paul tells us in Romans this about God’s wisdom. “Oh the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable are His ways for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been in his counsel.”

And so trust that leads to contentment believes that God is sovereign. It believes that God is wise. And then it believes that God is good. It believes that God is good. We could follow a God who is in control and we could follow a God who is wise. But if God is not good, then even in His wisdom, we might question the decisions that He makes and the things of life. But true contentment comes when we believe that God is all three. That He’s sovereign, that He’s wise, and that He’s good. And Solomon finishes this chapter with these words in verse 12. “For who knows what is good for a man while he lives in a 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?” Who knows what is good for a man? Who can tell man what will be after him?

Well, there’s an answer. And the answer to both of Solomon’s questions here is God. Not just God sovereign and God wise, but God good. And God can both provide and direct our lives. But we won’t trust Him if we don’t believe that He’s good. And yet the truth of the scriptures tells us that everything good comes from His hand. Even the breath that we breathe. The word of God tells us that every joy we experience and every rich gift that we receive comes from God’s hand. If we don’t know His word, we don’t know the truth of who He is. And we get caught up in life under the sun, then discontentment rules our hearts. But when we lift our

eyes up above it, and we look at God for who He has revealed himself to be in His good word, and we see the truth of Him that He is sovereign, that He is wise, and that He is good, then we can find true contentment.

What do we do with this reality relating to contentment, if Solomon's whole point is life under the sun is plagued with discontentment? Contentment can be found. And what do we do? Well, I want to end today with three applications. And the first is simply this. Let's trust Christ and see Him as most satisfying. Let's trust Christ and see Him as most satisfying. Virtually every verse in Ecclesiastes is begging us to look for an answer to the vanity of life, to look for an answer to what is perceived to be the meaninglessness of all of the striving in the pursuit of all of the things of this world. But that the answer isn't found in stuff. That's what Solomon's life shows us. And it's what his words even say. Everything he pursued left him short of what he was looking for.

So the answer isn't found in stuff, the answer is found in a savior. Only a savior can rescue us from meaninglessness. Someone had to step into this broken world under the sun and redeem it from its curse. Only Jesus can change the rhythm of life under the sun. You might say it this way. There really are two ways to live under the sun, the ball of heat and light, or under the Son, capital S-O-N. God in the flesh, the very creator of this world. How do we move from discontentment to contentment? Well, it starts with trusting this good God and the gift that He's given us. The gospel tells us the storyline of the scripture that the world was good and God made it. And then it was broken by our own sin. Why? Because of some of the truth found right here in Ecclesiastes 6.

Adam and Eve, in the garden of Eden, were discontent with the good things that God had given them. And they looked at something that they did not have and they envied it and longed for it. And they weren't satisfied with what He gave them. And because of it, they disobeyed God and they broke fellowship with Him. And the result of that broken fellowship in that garden affects all of us because now we are severed from the one who made us and we have inherited the sinful tendencies of our fathers. And this is why discontentment courses through life. Now we can ebb and flow in finding temporary contentment, but it never fully satisfied. And why? Because this world is broken. There is a brokenness that is here because discontentment evaded the hearts of our first parents and it left them longing for something more. And the whole of the scripture then is a search for the one who would change all of this.

And what we find in the beauty of how the scripture unfolds is that God tells us that there's one coming who will reverse this curse and in whom we will find true contentment. And so at every turn, all along the scriptures, we're looking to see if the people that come onto the scene are them. And they're not. Every one of them is a fallen man who's also discontent in their own ways. And yet they trust God and faith and they believe that He's sending a savior. And so it keeps pointing us forward. And then comes Christ, the answer to our discontentment. The one who can reverse the curse of the fall and restore us to the Father. And if you're listening to this sermon today and these words in Ecclesiastes, then you won't find Christ written into the text because He had not been fully realized at this time. That everything that Solomon is writing is pointing

toward what was coming. And Jesus is the answer. He is the one in whom we find restoration. And restoration with the Father is where true contentment resides.

If you're here today listening and you have never placed your trust in Christ, and you know that your life is turning with these wheels of moving in and out of satisfaction, I want to tell you that there is an answer. And it comes simply with believing in God and trusting in Him. And why can you trust Christ? Well, Romans 8:32. "He who did not spare His own son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?" We get all things. How? Through Christ and in Him. If you're here today listening and you've never trusted Christ, I would invite you to do so.

The second thing that I would ask us to consider doing is let's confess and repent of envy, and greed, and misplaced desires. Let's be honest that we shift our attention often to the things of this world in a way that elevates it above Jesus. We have to get the first one right first. We have to trust in Christ first before we see Him as most glorious, and Him is greater than these other things. And then that shows us the reality that envy and greed reside in our hearts. And then that gives us the power to be able to face those truths, those things that are plaguing us, and confess them and repent and turn away from them. And so let's be honest about our hearts and let's confess those things and repent of them. And then lastly, let's express gratitude for all we have been given. Let's express gratitude for all we have been given.

If we've trusted in Christ and we find Him most satisfying, then He makes all the things of this world pale in comparison. And He can change our hearts to move away from envy and greed, and change our hearts from placing our desires on the things that are lesser. And then with a true heart, we can turn to Him and we can lift our voices and gratitude. We have been given all things Paul says through Jesus.

And this morning, what we want to do is we want to give you a minute or two of time to pray over these three points. You may need to pray all three of them. In fact, I would encourage every one of us to spend time doing these three things. Asking God to help us see Him as most satisfying, confessing where we see that our hearts have desired other things, and then confessing our gratitude for the reality of the depth of all that we've been given. You were made to be satisfied. But you will not find it in the things of this world. You will only find true contentment in Christ. And so let's turn our hearts to these things and pray.

Lord, we pray that you would help us to find contentment in you. You have given us so much in Jesus Christ. And this world tempts us to look around and compare ourselves to others in categories that are not eternal, but in the eternal, we have everything in Jesus Christ. We have a treasure that will never fade. Lord, I pray that in every moment of our lives we would cling to you and our faith would be in you. That we would see you as our reward and our hope. We say that you are enough, Jesus. We pray this in your name. Amen.



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