

Ecclesiastes

Striving After the Wind

Lesson #7 for February 17, 2007

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 6.

1. This lesson covers Solomon's thoughts as expressed in Ecclesiastes 6. How can you be sure that you get your share of happiness? "Just grab whatever you can while you can." (Ecclesiastes 6:9, *The Message*) Is it true that our destiny and fate are fixed? (*Ibid*, 6:10) Is happiness or enjoyment the ultimate purpose of life? Why do bad things happen to good people? Was Jesus treated fairly? What about us? What about those who will face the final time of trouble?
2. Do you agree with Solomon that "We don't know what will happen after we die"? And "All will end up in the same place"? "We can't know the future so who knows what is best?"
3. Even in the United States Declaration of Independence, it says that every person has certain unalienable rights and among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness!
4. How could that pursuit of happiness be compatible with looking forward to a time of trouble? Should we be looking forward to a time of trouble? Can we look forward to the second coming of Jesus and work to hasten it, (2 Peter 3:12) and at the same time not look forward to the time of trouble which must precede it?
5. Do you agree with Pascal?

Let us reflect on this, and then say whether it is not beyond doubt that there is no good in this life but in the hope of another; that we are happy only in proportion as we draw near it; and that, as there are not more woes for those who have complete assurance of eternity, so there is no more happiness for those who have no insight into it. Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

6. Think of the history of the early disciples and apostles. What happened to them between Sabbath of crucifixion weekend and the days following the Pentecost? Were their lives totally redirected from thinking about things here on this earth to hopes of a future life? Did they stop caring completely about what happened to themselves here? Were they ever afraid to die?
7. When we are young, we tend to look forward to the exciting and the dangerous. When we get older we look forward to what is safe and secure. Why that change? Should we just be realistic and recognize that there is no safe and secure place on planet Earth at this point?
8. Is the fact that you know that there is a new heaven and a new earth coming, the only thing that gives you comfort and a feeling of security in life? (Revelation 21:3; Luke 21:33)
9. What is the difference between pursuing happiness and pursuing pleasure? The people in Old Testament times repeatedly turned to pagan idols, worshiping almost everything imaginable! God repeatedly pointed out the foolishness of doing that! (Psalms 115:1-8; Isaiah 44:9-17; Isaiah 45:20-22) The logic seems inescapable! So why did the people of Old Testament times find those idols so attractive? Was it that the worship of those man-made "no-gods" involved the pursuit of a lot of pleasure?
10. Why is it that so many people in our world are exchanging their hopes of eternal life for alcohol, tobacco, money, sexual immorality, drugs, possessions, and/or popularity and power? Do these things bring happiness? Lasting happiness?
11. What was Jesus talking about in John 10:10 when he promised, "I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of." (*Message*) Is that "real life"

only to be experienced in the next kingdom? What about the promise of Jesus: “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake, will receive a hundred times more and will be given eternal life”? (Matthew 19:29; Mark 10:30)

12. **Is there a substantial difference in the quality of happiness that the world is pursuing and the happiness which Jesus offers? What is the difference?**
13. To many people in our world, success is measured by the amount of their possessions. Do things give us real happiness? Certainly it's reasonable for us to work toward providing adequate housing, transportation, and food. Beyond those basic necessities how much is enough? Are we supposed to work hard for our basic necessities but despise anything beyond that? (Matthew 6:24)
14. “When do our appetites go from being life-sustaining to life-threatening? What are some modern behaviors that, in excess, threaten our spirituality?” *Adult Teacher's Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* p. 79
15. Paul says that the goal is to be content with whatever we have. (Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:6-8) How do we know if we have achieved that goal?
16. “The path to contentment is paved with acts of unselfish service through Jesus.” (*ibid*) Is it possible to experience real happiness by serving others? Is there a difference between the happiness that comes from giving, compared with the happiness that comes from getting?
17. Remember the experiences you have had with small children at Christmas time. They seem to be overjoyed by getting! What needs to happen for us to move beyond the attitude that says, “Give me! Give me! Give me!” to the act of finding real pleasure in giving?
18. What is the purpose of getting things? Is it so that we can enjoy them? Does God ever give us things and then cut off our lives so we cannot enjoy them? (Ecclesiastes 6:1,2) Does God ever engage in such sadistic actions?
19. Jesus suggests that real happiness comes by laying up treasures in heaven. (Matthew 6:19, 20; Luke 12:33) Is it clear in your mind how we actually do that? Are you establishing a large account in heaven?
20. The New Testament becomes quite explicit in stating what will happen to us after we die. Even Isaiah in the Old Testament gives us a pretty good picture. (See Isaiah 65) But Solomon seems not to be sure. Why do you think the issues in the great controversy and the rewards of the righteous are not spelled out more clearly in the early parts of Scripture?
21. Most of the people in our world are no longer certain about the Bible's promises regarding the future. Why do you choose to believe them?
22. Is your confidence in the future life and your relationship with Jesus such that you have lost all fear of death? Why or why not?
23. In our pursuit of happiness, the family is often the greatest source. But unfortunately, in our world, so many find that their families turn out to be sources of real stress. Why are some families full of great joy while some are full of great pain? Even in Bible times, real problems arose within families. Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-8); Joseph and his brothers (Genesis 37:19-36); David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1-4); Amnon and Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-14); children and parents turning against each other (Matthew 10:35-37); and even incest within the church (1 Corinthians 5:1).
24. Does God ever create within us desires that cannot be satisfied or fulfilled?

Creatures are not born with desire unless satisfaction for those desires exists.

A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. -- C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), page 121.

What do you think of his argument? People have often spoken about a God-shaped vacuum in our hearts. Is there within us a desire for God that cannot be filled by any other means?

25. We have already observed that there are many statements in Ecclesiastes that seem to be in contradiction to statements in other parts of the Bible, even in other parts of Solomon's writings. How are we supposed to handle these apparent contradictions?

- a. Eccl. 1:13: I determined that I would examine and study all the things that are done in this world. God has laid a miserable fate upon us.
Matthew 11:30: For the yoke I will give you is easy, and the load I will put on you is light.
- b. Eccl. 2:17: So life came to mean nothing to me, because everything in it had brought me nothing but trouble. It had all been useless; I had been chasing the wind.
John 4:34: "My food," Jesus said to them, "is to obey the will of the one who sent me and to finish the work he gave me to do."
- c. Eccl. 2:22,23: ²²You work and worry your way through life, and what do you have to show for it? ²³ As long as you live, everything you do brings nothing but worry and heartache. Even at night your mind can't rest. It is all useless.
John 17:4: I have shown your glory on earth; I have finished the work you gave me to do.
- d. Eccl. 2:24: The best thing anyone can do is to eat and drink and enjoy what he has earned. And yet, I realized that even this comes from God.
John 6:27: "Do not work for food that goes bad; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God, the Father, has put his mark of approval on him."
- e. Eccl. 3:17: I told myself, "God is going to judge the righteous and the evil alike, because every thing, every action, will happen at its own set time."
John 5:28,29: ²⁸Do not be surprised at this; the time is coming when all the dead will hear his voice ²⁹and come out of their graves: those who have done good will rise and live, and those who have done evil will rise and be condemned.
- f. Eccl. 4:1: Then I looked again at all the injustice that goes on in this world. The oppressed were weeping, and no one would help them. No one would help them, because their oppressors had power on their side.
Isaiah 61:1,2 ; Luke 4:18: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed.
- g. Eccl. 5:2: Think before you speak, and don't make any rash promises to God. He is in heaven and you are on earth, so don't say any more than you have to.
Matt. 7:7: "Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you."
- h. Eccl. 5:19,20: ¹⁹If God gives a man wealth and property and lets him enjoy them, he should be grateful and enjoy what he has worked for. It is a gift from God. ²⁰Since God has allowed him to be happy, he will not worry too much about how short life is.
Luke 6:20: Jesus looked at his disciples and said, "Happy are you poor; the Kingdom of God is yours!"

26. Have you ever felt like Solomon apparently felt in Ecclesiastes 6:3-6? Have you ever questioned whether there is any real meaning in this life? What meaning are we supposed to find? What pleasures are we supposed to enjoy? What happiness are we supposed to pursue? Honestly, would it be true that if you cannot find meaning in this life and you are not sure about the existence of a future life, there is really no reason for living? Have you ever felt that death would be a relief?
27. Do you ever worry about what you will do for eternity? Do you think you will get bored?
28. In light of what the New Testament teaches, we certainly should have no reason to fear death. Read John 5:28, 29; 6:54; 10:28; 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 21:4. Jesus says very clearly that he has conquered death and will give eternal life to his followers. What in your mind makes eternal life appealing? Why do you look forward to going to heaven?
29. Does it bother you to realize that whatever pleasure you may experience in this life, it will certainly end when you die? As far as this life is concerned, we all must agree where we are headed! We came from dust, we return to dust! Read Genesis 3:19; Psalms 104:29; Isaiah 57:12, 13; John 8:34; Romans 7:5; Ephesians 2:12.
30. So what advantage is there in being wise rather than foolish? What advantage is there in working hard on this earth? Solomon himself gave some suggestions in Proverbs 1:5-7; 3:35; 10:1,14; 12:15; 14:1,3; 15:7; 17:10-12; and 21:12. In these verses he suggests that the wise have respect for God, a good reputation, they can be proud parents, they gather knowledge and listen to advice, they build homes and experienced protection, and they can have wealth and luxury.
31. Jesus also describes the difference between wise and foolish. Read Matthew 7:24-27; 25:1-13. Why did the foolish people in these stories choose to be foolish? Did it really require that much additional effort to go the extra step to become “wise”? How often do we act like fools because we don’t put forward the little bit of extra effort needed to be wise? Pastor and author Gary Preston has written,

In light of what Ecclesiastes has said, I think it would not be contradicting him to suggest that twice a week for the rest of our lives we ought to begin the day by looking in the mirror and saying, “I am going to die someday—maybe today.” What a difference that would make in our lives!”—“The Great Spoiler,” Discipleship Journal, issue 19 (January/February 1984).

How do you think such a behavior would affect your life? Is it hard for us as human beings to be that honest with ourselves?

32. In conclusion, why is it so easy for us as human beings to be caught up in the pursuit of material things? How does this materialism affect our relationship to other human beings, to the church, to our employers, to the future life and to God?

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