

## **“The Best Way to Enjoy Life”**

### *Ecclesiastes 6:1-12*

On Dec. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2004 the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest earthquake ever recorded in history (9.1) hit the Indian Ocean sending 100' high waves onto Thailand, India and Indonesia from a massive tsunami killing over 225,000 people. In every disaster there are miracle survival stories.

One of those stories in the tsunami concerned a group called the Morgan sea gypsies, a tribe of 200 people who live mostly on their boats fishing around India, Thailand and Indonesia. During the winter months they live in shelters on the beaches of Thailand.

Like most tribes, much of their wisdom and traditions is passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. One of those teachings was that if they ever see the waters recede rapidly, then it will reappear with the same speed in which it left. If they ever saw that happen they were to run to the mountains immediately.

So when the waters receded rapidly, the Morgan gypsies, did not go out to scoop up all the fish they could have although some were tempted to, instead they ran to the highest spot at the warning of their elders. All survived.

This story was reported on 60 minutes a few months after the tsunami hit. Through a local interpreter who knew the people and their language quite well, we get a glimpse of an amazingly simple yet happy people. They had no possessions, no place they called home and they were very happy. Their language did not even have words for “want” or “worry” or “time”. They lived one day at a time, fishing and hunting for food for that day, enjoying the company of each other and not worried about losing or gaining possessions. They are a very wise people who lived by the words handed down to them from generation to generation.

We, of course, have words for “worry” and “want” and are overly concerned with time, especially our time on earth. Solomon says that to worry ourselves over wants and time is meaningless and like chasing after the wind. People who live life without God – under the sun – can not know true joy and will not experience eternal joy with God. They also do not understand suffering and trials and God’s purpose in them because they do not have God’s perspective.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon is contrasting these 2 world views – life lived under the sun, for self and the things of this world; versus life lived above the sun, fearing God, obeying His Word. Fearing God brings us joy; now, and for all eternity. Fearing God will result in relinquishing our worry to God; in wanting God more than the things of this world and being concerned more with how we use our time for God’s glory.

In ch. 5 Solomon gives us wise words about wealth and worship, ending the chapter with the biblical principle to enjoy your life (what you have and what you do) by seeing it all as God’s gifts to you. If you do this you’ll enjoy life and worry less because God is occupying us with His joy in our hearts.

Almost as if anticipating an objection, Solomon shares a ‘Yeah but I knew this guy’ ... story. The exceptions, the anomalies, the tragedies. So Ch. 6 begins

*I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: <sup>2</sup> 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.*

We're not given any details about this situation. It does say in the Hebrew 'a man' although some translations apply it already by saying "some". And that's fair because while many are able to enjoy their possessions, some don't. And Solomon blames God for this:

*but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.*

There's a lot of questions here. If he amassed a fair amount of wealth we should assume he had time to enjoy it, or never took the time to enjoy it, or a terrible tragedy happened that didn't enable him to enjoy it. Perhaps he fell and was a crippled. Or he was struck with a disease like leprosy. Or he was robbed ... We all know tragic stories. Yet some people have lived productive and godly lives in spite of the disaster God allowed to happen in their life. And I think Solomon is saying to all of us, just in case this happens to be your story ...

## **Enjoy the Life God Has Given You Today** **(6:1-9)**

If we have good health today, enjoy it because tomorrow we may not. If you have young children at home today, enjoy them because in no time they are adults. If you are blessed with a nice place to live and a few enjoyable possessions, thank God for them and enjoy them – because tomorrow wildfires may reach your door, or an enemy attacks your city, or tornado comes or a flood ...

All of us have said our goodbyes to people we love. Grandparents, parents, children, siblings, friends. Even if they lived a long life, a day came and they left this place. Some of whom we will never see again because they did not choose Jesus. Enjoy the people you have in your life, today. A day will come when they won't be here.

The 'man' Solomon talks about whose enjoyment of his position (honor) and possessions (wealth) was cut short somehow, Solomon says from an under the sun perspective is meaningless and a grievous evil. From a humanistic perspective. Yet all kinds of godly people have lost things in life tragically but didn't/don't live joylessly. Why not?

### ***They recognized God is sovereign over their life (vv.1-2)***

If God is sovereign over our life and something terrible happens to us, we at least know God has a purpose for it. Even if we never understand why specifically, we hang on to that foundational truth by faith knowing that this tragedy wasn't a random and meaningless punch in the gut. Too bad for you!

While Solomon 'blames' God with taking away this man's possessions and honor, he also credits God with being sovereign over his life. If he doesn't know God this might bring him to God. If he does know God, God can still use him somehow. It's not meaningless. From under the sun it seems that way, but the view above the sun is different. An above the sun perspective from Peter in 2 Peter. 1 says that

<sup>3</sup> His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. <sup>4</sup> Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

Where is the exception clause here, 'except when tragedy strikes you'? It's not there. Does Peter say if or misfortune strikes us that we can no longer participate in the divine nature? Our divine nature is our identity in Christ. Our future glorification is assured according to Paul in Rom. 8. What joy in God gives us is seeing our life from the divine nature side of things (above the sun) which helps us to escape the corruption of the world's evil desires. Why are they evil – even good things? Because the evil desires of earth do not build up our divine nature and don't satisfy us.

This is what Solomon indirectly points out in vv.3-6.

### ***Find joy in God not your possessions (vv.3-6)***

Solomon gives an exaggerated example, an extreme scenario:

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. <sup>5</sup> Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man— <sup>6</sup> even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

Unlike the first example, in this one the person lives a long life, has lots of wealth and a huge family – (longevity, prosperity and honor, the 3 most valued things one can have) – doesn't enjoy them. Well, whose fault is that? The Hebrew literally reads 'his soul is not satisfied with good things'. He unwisely did not take the time to enjoy the blessings God gave him. In his pessimistic 'under the sun' perspective Solomon says a stillborn, unnamed child who never sees the light of day and receives no burial or grave to mark his existence, is better off? If they both die and there is nothing after death than yes, But even Solomon will say later on in 12:7 that those who know God, their spirits will return to God. Solomon professes that life is in the womb because for a stillborn to die he/she must have lived.

So enjoying life means you have to have God's above the sun perspective. Solomon wraps up this little section in vv.7-9 telling us to

### ***Be content in God now; don't dream you'll find it elsewhere (vv.7-9)***

<sup>7</sup> All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied. <sup>8</sup> What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others? <sup>9</sup> Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Man's efforts (under the sun/without God) are only for himself, so his appetite is never satisfied. Makes no difference if you are 'wise' or a fool, or a poor man with knowledge. If you only live to feed your appetites, you will not be content. The word for appetite is "nephesh" the Hebrew word for our souls. Better what the eyes see – be content with what you have – rather than try to feed the appetite of your soul that can never be satisfied with earthly things or even people. You're chasing the wind if you're trying to satisfy your soul with the temporal and not the eternal. You'll never find contentment anywhere else other than God. Because, as Solomon said in 3:12

*He has also set eternity in the hearts of men*

We are hard-wired to be only satisfied in God. Some, however, don't like that answer. They don't want to hear God is in control, God alone can make us happy. So they search elsewhere for the answers. They argue against God with the people of God. Solomon says, stop striving.

## **Rest in the Wisdom and Providence of God** **(6:10-12)**

<sup>10</sup> *Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with one who is stronger than he.* <sup>11</sup> *The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?*

God made everything to exist. God made all of us fearfully and wonderfully. Many people will refuse to believe what God says in His Word and argue with God. So Solomon says . . .

### ***You won't win an argument with God (vv.10)***

"No one can contend with one who is stronger than he." Who's stronger than all of us? God. In Romans 9:20 Paul says, *"But who are you O man to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it, 'Why did You make me like this?'"*

*Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,* [James 1:19]

That goes with talking to God. Question Him less, Trust Him more.

<sup>12</sup> *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?*

### ***If we know God, our future is secure (v.12)***

God gives us some things we can know about the future but not all things. He gives us just enough to whet our appetites for eternity. But he tells us nothing about tomorrow or next week or the future our children will experience. Don't be consumed with worry about your future or your children's future. Only those who know God understand all these things.

This is one way you and I can be a witness to un-believers who worry about the future. Our calm assurance in Christ, even as we go through difficult times now, is a sign of God's strength in us to our unbelieving family and friends. Use their worry about the future as an opportunity to share with them about the One who knows the future and holds our lives in His hands. Jesus reminds us not to worry about the things we don't need and to focus on the things that matter:

**Matt. 6:25** *"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?"* <sup>26</sup> *Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"* <sup>27</sup> *And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"* <sup>28</sup> *And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin,* <sup>29</sup> *yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.* <sup>30</sup> *But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?"* <sup>31</sup> *Therefore*

*do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

*<sup>34</sup> "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

- \* \* \* \* \*
- If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at [olivet@rideau.net](mailto:olivet@rideau.net)