

Ecclesiastes 3-5 • Understanding life "under the sun"

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If you can imagine what it would be like to be the wisest man on earth; to have all the resources at your fingertips that you need to be able to do anything that you want, and to set out on a grand experiment to discover if there's any meaning to life apart from God – in other words, under the sun, as Solomon likes to say – what an incredible experience that might be.

As we're opening up chapter 3, we're finding Solomon as he speaks about the monotony of life. Some of the things we go through here in Ecclesiastes are kind of interesting from the standpoint that Solomon is finding that life apart from God is monotonous, it's meaningless, and really the only thing that you can lay hold of that is going to kind of get you through another day is to just kind of be happy. And you'll see that in these verses that we're looking at here tonight. But as we open up chapter 3, he talks about time.

You know, we're very big into time. I think probably ever since the invention of the clock – I don't know if that was a good thing necessarily or bad because it seems like we've been obsessed with time ever since, and we're always trying to make it mean more or we want to make it go faster or we want to make it go more slowly. However, we find that we are essentially slaves to it, and we really can't control it.

And Solomon talks here about the fact that seasons come and seasons go in kind of a cyclical fashion. And he observes as we get into these first verses, verses 1-8, that life seems to have seasons of events for each part of life. Look at verse 1; he says: *"For everything, there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:" (ESV)*

And then he goes on to list a lot of matters. It's not all of the matters under heaven, but he says there's: *"² a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; ³ a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;*

⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to

embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;

⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.”

Once again, as human beings thinking about time, living in this life – and remember Ecclesiastes is a grand experiment to check life out apart from God – we have to look at time for what it is. It's a master; it's one of our masters anyway. And one of the things that has always kind of challenged me as a believer is that there seems to be times for things that we just can't control.

For example, I like looking into the history of the Christian church and reading about the great revivals. And I get done reading those and I end up kind of coming to the conclusion that was a season that God gave to the church. And there've been several; the last really major revivals here in the United States happened in the late sixties and early seventies. And it was huge, and that's where Calvary Chapel actually grew up out of that revival. But we haven't seen it since.

We went through the remainder of the seventies and the eighties and the nineties, and then 2010 and now we're at 2020 and we still haven't seen anything repeated like that, at least here in the United States of America. Not to say that there haven't been some revivals in other parts of the world, but it's always kind of challenging that it seems like there's a time for revival and then there's a time for things to just kind of remain as they are and not to kind of be revived. And we would like to think that we could make it happen, I'd love to think that.

And I'm not saying that we shouldn't pray for revival; I'm not saying that at all because frankly we can see that many of the revivals were precipitated by some real concerted prayer, by very dedicated believers. But we end up looking at the seasons of life that come and go, and we realize that ultimately, we're kind of helpless in the face of times endless and monotonous activity to really change anything. The seasons go just like we're technically in winter right now – although it doesn't feel like it lately feels more like spring. But we can't change how the weather feels, we can't change how it's going to feel tomorrow or the next day. And apart from God, there is a helplessness to all of it.

But for you and I lifting ourselves now out of the Book of Ecclesiastes as believers in Christ, we have a better understanding of the sovereignty of God over those things. And the movement of time goes from being this immovable,

inflexible master that we have to just put up with, it goes rather to become an expression of God's perfect will that we learn to yield to and we learn to rest in.

I mean, as believers, I'm not saying that's easy; to yield to God's timing in the seasons that He does things in the timing that He does them. God rarely moves as fast as I would want Him to. But we learn as believers we learn over time bringing God into time, we learn.

Lord. I yield to You. I yield to your timing; your timetable is not mine, I get that. And even though this isn't happening as quickly as I would like it to, I yield. It's a learning process, isn't it? Where we're learning to surrender. We're learning to wait.

When we were going through our study in the Psalms, how many times did David say, I wait, I'm waiting on the Lord. And he'd talk about that over and over. That's not an easy thing to do. We made mention of that in our study of Psalms.

Waiting on the Lord is one of the most incredibly difficult things to do; to wait on his timetable. But to understand that he has a sovereign plan that goes into these things gives you and I the ability not just to feel like we're slaves to time, but we're waiting on the Lord. We're waiting on the Lord's good pleasure. We're waiting on the Lord's wisdom to be played out as it relates to time and timing of events and that's sort of thing. And we hopefully come to a place of resting in his timing. Although that's hard, but that ought to be part of our prayer, Lord, teach me to rest.

Now, apart from God, you take God out of the equation and it's just exactly what Solomon is saying here in the first part of Ecclesiastes. There's a time and a season and there's nothing you can do to change it. There's a season for doing this and a season for doing that; a time for doing this and a time for doing that and you just go with the seasons and you go with the time, and that's just the way it is.

Now beginning in verse 9, Solomon is going to ask a question that you're if you were with us last week in our first two chapters, you'll see that he asked really the same question last week. But this time he's going to offer up some answers, which is always satisfying.

But he begins in verse 9 by saying: *"What gain has the worker from his toil?"* And again, that's a basic question asking why we as human beings seem to, we throw ourselves into our work; and most of us do, and we do it with

diligence and passion. But ultimately because Solomon is trying to ask the question, is there any real and lasting meaning to life apart from God, he's saying, is there any real gain?

I mean, ultimately, other than you make money, you buy food, but then you got to make more and eat more. So what is your real gain? What is the real gain going to be? But this time he goes on and he says, look at verse 10:

“I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”

And that's kind of an interesting statement. God has put eternity into the hearts of man and yet we can't understand eternity. We understand there is such a thing, He's put it in our hearts, but we don't get it. And we can't leap beyond time and that sort of thing like God can. So, here's his conclusion verse 12:

“I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; ¹³ also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man.”

There you go. That's it, you guys. You know your unsaved neighbor? This is life for them this is their life. As he describes it right here in verses 12 and 13. He says, I perceive there's nothing better than for man under the sun. Apart from God, there's really nothing better for him than just to be joyful and to do good, as long as you live and to take pleasure.

Do you know what he's saying in a poetic way? He's saying exactly the same word thing they say on the Disney channel. Just be happy, as long as you're happy. It's the exact same thing. It's just using a couple of different words. He's a little more poetic about it, but what he's saying is the best you can be is just happy.

So there you go. Apart from God, what else you got? What are you going to live for? It's just happiness. That's all you got. As long as you're happy that's what people say. We're thinking of moving to..., as long as it makes you happy.

And now we've opened up doors to all kinds of sinful activity and just said as long as you're happy and as long as you're not hurting anybody and you're happy, it's okay. Because happiness, it's the chief end of man. And we judge right and wrong according to whether we're happy. Hey, if I'm happy, it can't be

wrong, right? Hey, we're happy. Yeah, I'm happy. Are you happy? Yeah, I'm happy. Then it's good for you. There you go. Now, go be happy. That's exactly what Solomon is saying here. He says, I've come to this conclusion. There's nothing better than just to be happy. Sounds pretty disgusting.

Anyway, verse 14: *"I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him."*

Now, you might be kind of wondering here, in this experiment that Solomon is doing to kind of assess the purpose and meaning of life under the sun or apart from God, why is he talking about God so much here?

It's interesting. Don't let that weird you out at all. Because people who live under the sun, in other words, people who live their lives apart from God, often acknowledge that God exists. They will acknowledge God. A lot of people do that and yet, in a practical sense, they're atheists.

Listen to what I said – a practical sense. Do you know what that means? That means in the day to day life, they live their lives as if God doesn't exist. But they acknowledge Him with their mind, and sometimes even occasionally with their speech, they'll talk about God. But they're not trusting Him, they're not living for Him, they're not opening their heart to Him in any way. But they'll talk about God once in a while. Sure, you bring up the subject of God, they'll engage you politely, as long as you don't get too weird about it.

And that's what Solomon is doing here. So, this is still life under the sun, you guys. But under the sun, I'll talk to you about God; I won't live for Him, I won't appropriate His word in my life, and I won't look at life through the lens of His revelation, but I'll talk about Him. I'll say God, God this, God that.

And so, he's kind of talking here, and he says, I perceived that whatever God does, He does and it endures forever. Nothing can be added to it, nothing taken from it. There's nothing I can do about that. He's God, right? So God's done it. There you go. What are you going to say?

Verse 15: *"That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away."*

So again, Solomon sees human history as kind of this repeating cycle. He sees the monotony in it. He says whatever has happened before, it's going to happen again.

And then he goes on in verse 16. He says: *“Moreover, I saw under the sun (apart from Him, life on earth) that in the place of justice (such as in a court of law), even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness (such as in a church or a place of worship), even there was wickedness. ¹⁷ I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work.”*

All right. Stop there for just a minute. Again, this is a common belief among people, even who are living apart from God; they acknowledge God and they'll even talk about judgment day sometimes. And if you were to ask those kinds of people, do you think you're going to get into heaven? They say, well, if there is a place like heaven, I hope God looks at my life and says the good outweighs the bad. I hope that's what happens. People living under the sun will talk that way.

And that's kind of the way Solomon is talking here. He says, I know that God's going to judge all things one day, and there's a time for every matter and reckoning and stuff. And I figure accounts are probably going to be settled one day and there's this vague sort of an understanding of judgment.

I'm not going to let it affect my life. I'm not going to live my life as if I'm going to be judged. I'm just going to live my life and just say I hope God accepts me.

And that's the way a lot of people live who are practical atheists. Again, intellectually, they may consider themselves, they may even tell you they're Christians. But in a practical, day to day, experiential walking out of life, they are atheists, because they live their lives apart from God. But they'll talk about stuff, all the time that may have to do with God.

Verse 18: *“I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts.”*

That's an interesting sort of an idea, isn't it? But isn't that the exact conclusion that man under the sun has come to? You know that evolutionary thought just looks at you as just another mammal, right? You're just part of the animal kingdom, you just happen to be on the top of the heap. And frankly, in some situations, you aren't at the top of the heap, but for the most part you're just an animal.

Look at verse 19: *“For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same*

breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. ²⁰ All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return.

And an afterlife? Who knows. Look at verse 21, that's what he's saying: *"Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth?"*

We really don't know because you see life under the sun. We don't know these things. We don't have an understanding. So we'll talk about them like we think we might know, or I'll tell you what I kind of wish would be. But honestly, I really don't know.

My future is really no different than fido. You know, I mean, fido is going to kick the bucket one of these days, and so am I. And who's to say whether I go up and fido goes down. Because in my understanding of life and death under the sun, I see we both just, we die. And we're buried, and he says, man has no advantage over the animals.

Did you catch that? He says that right there in verse 19, man has no advantage over the animals. Now, that's not a perspective that comes from God's Word. That's a perspective that comes from life under the sun, right? Do you think that your life has no advantage over your dog or your cat or your horse or your gerbil?

You and I, according to the Bible, have been created in the image of God. You and I have been created to be immortal. When this life is over, this life is not over and I didn't just contradict myself. When the body dies, you keep living. You can't say that about fido, I'm sorry.

Every time I say something like that, I usually get a nasty gram from a pet owner somewhere who absolutely loves their pet and wants to be in heaven with their pet. I get that, but I just hope you live a long way from me in heaven or whatever. I'm going to be in a no pet zone in heaven.

I understand, but I honestly don't believe that the Bible supports the idea of animals going to heaven because heaven is for people. Heaven is for the redeemed. It's for those who have embraced the redemption that is offered through Jesus Christ. I'm not saying there won't be animals in heaven, I think there probably will be. Because there's going to be a new heaven and a new earth that is going to come together. And there were animals on the first earth. There's no real reason to believe there won't be animals on the new earth that God creates. Just not in my neighborhood, that's all.

But there is a huge advantage that you and I have over animals. But that only comes from a revelation of God's Word. Your neighbor, who believes in evolution and rejects the idea of God believes that his life is no more important, well if he's going to be honest with you, than the tree in his front yard. Truly, there's a very radical kind of an idea among certain groups that the tree in your front yard has just as much right to live as do you.

You and I understand that this earth was created for man and mankind is God's master creation. Only mankind is it said that we were created in the image of God. Only mankind; not the animals, not the trees, nothing else in all of creation, the fish or the birds, only mankind. And so, there's a huge advantage between you and your dog, you being a human being. But imagine the hopelessness that comes from this kind of an attitude, which is really what's kind of being expressed right here.

So, the usual conclusion in verse 22 is: *“So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?”*

In other words, after he's dead, he can't come back and see anything. So the best thing to do is just be happy. Same conclusion, right? We're back to the Disney channel; as long as you're happy, we're good, and everything's fine. And let's just try to be happy, okay? I just want to be happy.

I've had people, I've had Christians say to me, pastor Paul, I just want to be happy. That's very worldly. I want to be happy too, but I'm telling you, if you run after happiness, you won't find it. I'm telling you, if you make happiness the chief end of your life, you will not find it.

We live in this weird sort of a kingdom now. We've been birthed into this new kingdom. And guess how you find life? By dying. Guess how you find greatness? By being the least. Yeah, we live in this upside down kingdom. You run after happiness, you're not going to find it. You're going to find sorrow. Run after the Lord. Run after Jesus.

Chapter 4: *“Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.”*

And now Solomon is looking at the injustice of life. He says that oppression is something that plagues humankind. And he's right, it's all too common in a

fallen world. So, what's his conclusion? The conclusion of the man who is talking about life apart from God.

Verse 2: *“And I thought the dead who are already dead more fortunate than the living who are still alive.”*

Isn't that just a hopeful statement? He says: *“³ But better than both is he who has not yet been and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.”*

And it is, it's a very hopeless thing to say, but it accurately reflects the reasoning of the natural man living apart from God. He says, I've been looking at all the oppression. I looked in the court system and I see corruption. I look at politicians and I see corruption. I look at government, I look at landowners that are gouging the people who want to... just looking for a place to live.

And I look at the business owners who are barely paying a living wage to their employees. And I look at this and I look at that and then I look at...and then there's the sex trade, the slave trade that goes on around the world and all.

And you look at those things long enough and good grief. I mean, that's it's terrible. It's terrible. But you and I look at those things differently because we look at those things through the lens of God's Word. Imagine you don't have that lens.

What's your conclusion? The conclusion is, you know what? You're better off dead. That's it. That's it right there. He says I came to the conclusion, verse 2, that the people who are dead are more fortunate than the people who are alive because they don't have to put up with this junk. And frankly, better than those are the ones who haven't even come yet. They haven't even been born. Yeah. Wow. Doesn't it sound like just a wonderful way to live?

Verse 4: *“Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.”*

And so, what Solomon is saying here, he says, I started looking at the people who work hard and they become very skillful in their tasks and stuff. And he said, I've realized that the reason that they do that is because they want to appear better than the next person. There's a competition going on. There's a jealousy. There's this need in us to appear respected by others and so forth. And Solomon considered that an empty and meaningless pursuit.

He says in verse 5: *“The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh.”*

And I need to explain that statement because he's contrasting now the person who works hard, but works hard for the wrong reasons. Now he talks about the fool who doesn't work hard and his lifestyle is such that he ruins his own life. And that's what that means by, eats his own flesh. It's rather gruesome imagery there of cannibalizing oneself. But he's saying that a lazy person is literally like someone who eats themselves. In other words, it's a very destructive way of living life.

And so, here's his conclusion, verse 6: *"Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind."*

So, he's saying it's better to have a quiet life, even if you don't get very much out of it in terms of produce or fruitfulness, it's better to live a quiet life than to have your hands full of the possessions of this world. But yet there's this endless striving and this reckless competition and jealousy and all these things that go along with the reason why, I want to have that new car. I'm going to get that new condo. I'm going to get the highest pay. I'm going to get employee of the month. I'm going to do this and I'm going to get a raise and a bonus and all this striving. He says it's better to live with a little and just to live a quiet life.

That's a good conclusion. It's a wise conclusion. It's not necessarily a conclusion a lot of people come to because they don't have the same wisdom that Solomon had.

Verse 7 he says: *"Again, I saw vanity under the sun: ⁸ one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, 'For whom am I toiling and depriving myself (for of all this stuff)?' (He says) This also is vanity and an unhappy business."*

Solomon observes this man who is just working hard, putting in all these hours at work and he's got nobody in his life; nobody to share the fruit of his labors. And Solomon says, how empty is that? How empty is that to work and work and work and work, and you go home to an empty house. There's nobody to share it with nobody to have joy with or whatever. He's just constantly toiling, and he's never satisfied with how much he's got; got to have more. Why? He's just got to. He's driven. And then to contrast that idea of the person who's alone, he then talks about the blessings or the benefits of those who have someone in their life that they can share with.

Look what he goes on to say, verse 9 and following. He says: *"Two are better than one (that's simple logic, but he says), because they have a good reward for*

their toil. ¹⁰ For if they fall (if one of them falls down), one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

¹¹ Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? ¹² And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him (in fact, he says)—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” You take a pretty small piece of thread or twine and mix it, twine it up together making a rope out of it, and it becomes very strong very quickly.

Further observation here, connected earlier to the man who works hard has no one to share his labors. He says, but the person who has someone in their life there's more benefit to that. And by the way, we shouldn't look at these verses as only referring to marriage.

They certainly do. But I want to be careful about saying that marriage is the only way that you can really see this, because frankly, there are some people who God does not call to get married. There are some people who are called into a life of singleness, and I don't want you to feel like if you are a single person that you can't have any of these things because there are other kinds of friendship and camaraderie that can take hold of the benefits that Solomon talks about here.

Verse 13: *“Better was a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who no longer knew how to take advice.”* Now Solomon is going to observe here a little bit some of the follies and vanities of life that can even reach into the palaces of kings. And he speaks of two individuals; one who's young and inexperienced, but still has some wisdom. And then he has an old experienced king who believes that he's above all advice. He's above everyone else. And Solomon tells him, you know what? I'd rather have that young inexperienced guy speaking into my life than an old king who thinks that he's beyond taking advice anymore.

Verse 14, he's talking about that poor and wise youth. He says: *“For he went from prison to the throne, though in his own kingdom he had been born poor. ¹⁵ I saw all the living who move about under the sun, along with that youth who was to stand in the king's place. ¹⁶ There was no end of all the people, all of whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him.”*

Again, he says, you know what? A young, inexperienced guy who came out of poverty and then took the throne, he's better to have on the throne than an old surly king who has a lot of experience, but you can't tell him anything anymore.

But he says, you know what? Eventually, even though that young man takes the throne, first of all, there's going to be all these people under him and there's going to be no end to all of it. And then eventually, what they're going to do? They're going to hate him. They'll love him at first, but then eventually his approval rating is going to plummet.

We see that. We see the same thing happen in modern politics, don't we? We bring some guy into office and his approval rating, and I always wonder why the news makes such a big deal. Our new president has an approval rating of 96%. Of course he does, he hasn't done anything yet. Just give him a minute to mess up and then after about a year and a half, the president's approval rating is down at 33%. Yeah, exactly. Are any of us surprised when that happens? We all think he's great, oh, let's vote him into office. But a year and a half later we're like, get rid of the bum.

And that's what Solomon is seeing here. And he says at the end of verse 16, *"Surely this also is vanity and a striving after wind."* Or as we said before, a dog chasing his tail. It's just, it's dumb.

Chapter 5: *"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they are doing evil. ² Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few."*

Now what Solomon is doing here in this chapter, at least at the beginning of this chapter, he's been developing up to this point things in life that can easily ruin a person. And he talks about it as vanity, but he says there's a lot of things that can take away everything that you've worked hard for. And he's turning now to one of the things that can take away an individual's blessing; and that is making a rash vow.

And so, he says here, don't be rash with your mouth. Don't let your heart be hasty. Don't utter a word before God. Because people would make vows, and they would say, as God is my witness, or I promise by Jerusalem, or something, whatever. They always try to vow and use something that's greater than themselves to hold them to their vow or to show that they're sincere about their vow. But you make a dumb vow, you make a rash vow, you make a promise, and then you find that you can't keep your vow, or you find that what you've said isn't really true, and you can be ruined. And what Solomon is doing is he's simply talking about the fact that somebody can speak very rashly and very quickly be brought to utter ruin.

Verse 3, he goes on: *“For a dream comes with much business, and a fool's voice with many words. ⁴ When you vow a vow to God, do not delay paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow. ⁵ It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.”*

And he's talking about this in a truly Old Testament kind of a fashion to kind of say, hey if you make a vow to God, you better be careful and do it, or life isn't going to go very well for you.

“⁶ Let not your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷ For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity (in other words, emptiness), but God is the one you must fear.”

Solomon is referring here to people who have worked and gained things in this life, and then they lose everything in a moment of foolish speaking. And he goes on to speak here of other issues related to wealth and money.

Verse 8, he says: *“If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them.”*

In other words, what he's saying is one of the results of layered leadership is that everyone wants a cut and they're always putting pressure on their underlings. And often it comes by way of corruption, political or military or whatever, and all kinds of dishonesty. And notice what Solomon says here. He says, when you see the poor being oppressed, when you see justice being violated, don't be amazed. Don't be surprised. Don't bang your fist and go, what in the world is going on? This is part of life under the sun. It's part of life.

He goes on to verse 9 to say: *“But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.”* And then I love this statement because it's so true.

Look at verse 10. If this isn't underlined in your Bible, this is truly a piece of wisdom: *“He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity.”*

And Solomon is making a simple observation here, and he ought to know because he was filthy rich, people who love money are never satisfied with their money because the more you have, the more you want.

And one of the things we learn about having money for those of you – I've read about this, but is that money can't buy contentment. The Beatles said money can't buy you love, but it definitely can't buy you contentment. If you have money you won't be content.

Contentment is a great thing; to live your life in a contented way, contented with your life. I'm content. Keeps you out of a lot of trouble. It really does. Let me show you what the apostle Paul had to say on this from 1 Timothy 6 up on the screen. Paul wrote:

1 Timothy 6: 6-10 (NIV84)

...godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

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I quoted that out of the NIV because I kind of like the way that's worded there. This is really interesting, isn't it? It says, “*godliness with contentment is great gain.*” Godliness with contentment. Of course, godliness is something we pursue because we have a relationship with God, and we know that He wants to do His work and perfect will in our lives, which is godliness. And so, when there's that godliness going on in our lives, contentment is great gain.

And then he makes that interesting statement. He says if we have food and clothing, that's enough. And it's kind of interesting, isn't it? Because as Christians, we can be convicted when we read that. Are you satisfied with just food and clothing? Is that good enough for you? Do you know why he says that? Because we know that this life isn't all there is. If this life is all there is, if you're living life under the sun, as Solomon is describing here, then you're not going to be content with just food and clothing. Because this is the only chance you get to get what you want.

And you got to make it big. You got to be happy. And it's like, hey, I'm just not happy. I don't have enough. I'm not content. Well, the problem is that is a dog chasing its tail. I'm never going to be content because the more I run after those things, the more I'm going to want of those things. But I'm going to keep going because you know what? This is all it is, the only chance I get. This life, when this life is over, it's over. Done. Finished.

You and I know it's quite different from that. The Bible tells you and I that we are joint heirs with Christ. That's pretty crazy, isn't it? We don't even know what that means. If we did, I dare say you wouldn't be able to hold your seat. I mean, if we really knew what it meant to be a joint heir with Christ. Crazy. There's so much better stuff coming for you and I. We know that, but the only reason we know that is because we don't live our lives under the sun. We live our lives above, keeping our eyes on Jesus and on the revelation of His truth. And so, it can move us to a contentment with godliness.

Verse 11, look at this: *“When goods increase, they increase who eat them (I like that), and what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes?”*

So, I love these statements. Solomon says that when a man's wealth increases, there's always going to be a corresponding increase in ways for his money and possessions to go out the window, just fly out the window. The faster they come in, the faster they're going to go out. Suddenly, everybody and their brother ends up on your doorstep because your goods have increased. Heard you won the lottery, uncle Bill! In the end, what's the only real benefit?

Look what he says there at the end of verse 11 again. He says, what advantage has the owner of all these things that he's amassed except just to look at them? That's it. All he can do is just look; he can look at his spreadsheet or his checkbook register and go, wow, I've got a lot of money! That's it. That's as good as it gets.

It's that picture of Scrooge counting his gold coins and a little evil laughter under his breath and whatever. And Solomon says, it's very shallow. It's a very shallow kind of reward. I have all this stuff, what's my big reward for having it all? I get a look at it. But look what he says; it's interesting by contrast. Verse 12, he says: *“Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much...”*

He doesn't have any major concerns because he's not a rich man. He's not a wealthy man. He doesn't own much. He has very little to speak of in terms of the goods of this world. And he may not have a lot to eat even on a given day. He may go to bed even with a little hunger in his belly. But you know what? He

sleeps good because he doesn't have any problems. He doesn't have all the issues that go along with having all this wealth.

But then he goes on to say: “...*but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.*”

And that's not talking about indigestion. It's talking about the fact that even though his stomach may be full because he's got a lot of money, he doesn't sleep because he's got things keeping him up at night, because there's always something to deal with, another problem to solve or an employee who's given him trouble or something like that.

Verse 13: “*There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owner to his hurt,*”

Good grief. We make reality TV shows about this today. Have you ever watched Hoarders? Hoarding is actually, it's part of mental illness, frankly, but people hoard things to their own hurt. They're so afraid of letting go or getting rid of things. It becomes unhealthy. It becomes actually harmful to them, and Solomon calls it a grievous evil.

He goes on in verse 14 to say: “*and those riches were lost in a bad venture. And he is father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand.*” He has nothing to give his boy. It's another grievous evil; riches that are lost in a bad venture. Somebody makes a bad investment, loses everything. And he's got a son. He's got children. He's got no way to take care of them because he had money yesterday, but then he made an investment and he lost everything. It's a grievous evil.

But when you're living life under the sun, what are you going to say? When the stock market, the big stock market crashed, the big crash happened, there were people jumping out of windows; committing suicide when they lost all of their money because that's life under the sun. You make a wrong investment or the stock market crashes or something like that and you're done. You got no money. You got no money left. If you're living life under the sun, you've got nothing. If you're living life above the sun and you're living life with the Son of God, you can turn to him always, and you can know that God is going to see you through. And there's always hope. There's always hope.

Verse 15, he's still talking about the man who has lost everything. He says: “*As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand.*”

And, *“This also (he says, verse 16) is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?”* He's done all this work and can't take a red scent with him. What good is it? He says.

“¹⁷ Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger.”

And this is the real bummer. You work all your life, you gain all these things, and then you get to that place that is normally recognized by society as old age, and then your body falls apart. Isn't that fun? You've been working hard all your life and now your body falls apart and you live the rest of your life in darkness, in vexation, in sickness and anger.

What are you angry about? Again, my body's falling apart and I got nothing. Everything I've worked for, now I'm in my golden years and I can't even travel. I had this big plan that I was going to retire and I was going to travel and I can't. I've got to stay near the doctor. I've got to go in for treatments regularly. I've got to do this and now I'm angry and I'm bitter.

It's because I've been living my life under the sun. And I adopted the desires of the world. And even though I'm a believer, in many cases, I've been living my life as a practical atheist and now I'm disappointed.

I mean, we know it happens to the people of the world. We know it. It shouldn't happen to us. The people of the kingdom. It shouldn't because if in our old age, when our bodies fall apart, God still has a purpose for our lives. He still has things for you to do. Even if it's sitting in one room, even if you're in bed and you can't get out. There's things you can do. Even if it's just prayer. I say just prayer, one of the most powerful things Christians can do.

You're not limited. You can still move mountains from your bedroom. The person under the living under the sun isn't going to figure that out. They're just going to say, it's all been taken away from me. Everything that I cared about has been taken away. But the Christian has a different perspective. There are certain things in my life which can never be taken away, ever. The purpose and the will of God in my life can never be taken from me, because it's God who gave it and nothing can be taken from Him, amen.