

Beyond Appearances

Ecclesiastes 6:1-7:15

God is the giver every good and perfect gift, as James says (1:17), but just because someone has received a lot does not mean he can enjoy it. Qoheleth addresses the inequalities obvious in a vaporous world. Rather than thwart or contradict the plan of God, these are established by Him. God gives us wisdom lit to teach the simple and to increase the learning of the wise (Prov. 1:1-7; Jn. 5:24). These verses won't make it onto any inspirational posters, but they will deepen your knowledge and love for your creator.

The Map

- I. **1:1-2:26** Satisfaction cannot be found in a vaporous world. Only God can give it.
- II. **3:1-5:20** God is sovereign over all despite grief and hardships.
- III. **6:1-8:15** Having strength and wealth does not mean you have the power to enjoy them.
 - i. **6:1-12** Prosperity is not always a blessing.
 - ii. **7:1-15** Adversity is not necessarily an evil.
- IV. **8:16-12:14** Last, Solomon addresses challenges and difficulties, and the need to seek wisdom and live joyfully despite them. This is the gift of God.

Minted & Miserable

Solomon's sees this common evil under the sun, the man who has riches, wealth (the ability to produce), and honor, lacking nothing he desires, and yet he cannot taste it (vv. 1-2). There he is with his yacht, other yacht, (new) wife, humming company, more money than he could ever spend, and yet he can't enjoy it. You can't necessarily see this at a glance, but Solomon has been there and knows. It would be better to have floating raft made of the sticks you tied together and laugh at the goodness of God to you than to have a yacht without the laughter. A stranger will consume the stuff and enjoy it (v. 2). The second example is of a guy who has a hundred children and lives long to enjoy them—or so you would think—but isn't satisfied with this goodness, and thus a stillborn child is better off (vv. 3-4). This doesn't make sense to us. At least he got to live, right? But what good is it to do all the work of childbearing and rearing, and not to be truly satisfied? Unlike the guy whose wealth was enjoyed by a stranger, this guy's kids will get it, but he doesn't really enjoy that, so who cares? If a man lives for 2000 years and never rests in God, his futile journey ends in the same place as that stillborn child (vv. 5-6). Solomon notes our circular existence: you work to eat and eat to work, and yet satisfaction evades whether you are wise or dumb (vv. 7-8). A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush, so you can receive what God has actually given instead of longing for what He hasn't (v. 9). Men want to grab hold of their circumstances, to wield their destiny and become like God, and yet you can't climb into His lap to take a shot at Him (v.10). The more you try, the more vapor you encounter (v. 11). You don't know what's coming or when you are leaving this earth, your vaporous life passing like a shadow (v. 12). As always, the preacher is going somewhere, and the distinction he makes is between all of these material, relational, common-grace gifts and the greatest gift which is the ability to enjoy them. This only comes through being in fellowship with God now, receiving everything from His gracious hand. The Deuteronomic blessings are ours in Christ and can only be received by faith.

Good Out of Bad

When talking to little kids we speak in the plain terms of black and white. We should still love this and never grow tired of it. Jesus is Lord and we are not. Love Him and hate evil. Plain the general biblical truths

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are not contradicted by deep wisdom any more than calculus or quantum mechanics defy addition and subtraction. These deep things build upon the basic things. Just as prosperity is not always a good thing, so affliction is not necessarily an evil thing. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God (Rom. 8:28), so these challenges are adversities come His loving hand to provide just what we need to grow in wisdom, strength, and glory. This is how to see and live in the world as a child of grace. These are “good” things and “better” things and it takes wisdom to see why. The first of four topics states that death is a better instructor of the living than birth (vv. 1-4). A good name is better than expensive ointment, the day of death better than the day of birth (v. 1). Nothing wrong with good smelling and healing stuff, but the wise value their reputation. If this refers to anointing oil applied at burial, then it would be better to go out with integrity than money. The day of death is better than the day of life because the race is complete. To live is Christ and to die is gain (Phil. 1:21). It’s better to go to the house of mourning than the house of feasting because there you reflect on the things that matter most. This doesn’t mean it’s bad to go to the house of feasting, and we generally go there a lot more. So it’s really good to take it to heart and think about how short your life is, how to live in light of that, and to be ready to stand before your maker (v. 2). Sadness is not a bottomless well of despair, but leads to a whole heart, and so the wise go there while fools chase laughter at the expense of reality (vv. 3-4). The second topic: rebuke is better than frivolous praise (vv. 5-7). Fools sing emptily, so better receive sober correction from the wise (v. 5). Thorns crackle and hiss when burned but produce no heat, so the empty chuckles of the fool (v. 6; cf. Ps. 141:5). Tolerating oppression warps one’s ability to think and taking bribes distorts heart motives (v. 7). The third point is that patient hope is better than arrogant whining (vv. 8-10). It’s better to wait patiently on God’s timing for completion than to proudly presume or predict (v. 8). Fools get angry fast but the righteous imitate the Lord’s slowness to anger (v. 9). Nostalgia is often false. The former “glory days” were not necessarily that glorious, but if they were, dwelling on them isn’t wise (v. 10). The fifth point is that wisdom helps with inheritance, in adversity, and gives life to those who have it (vv. 11-12). And the final, sixth point tells us to notice the work of God (vv. 13-15). Who can straighten what He has made crooked (v. 13)? We should receive and enjoy prosperity from Him, but also know adversity comes from His hand and we don’t know what will follow (v. 14). Solomon saw it all in his vaporous days: just men perish in righteousness and wicked men live long in wickedness (v. 15).

Joy at the End

In 8:15, we see a similar conclusion as 2:24-26 and 5:18-20: “So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.” This is not a merriment of despair nor a surface joy that ignores what is really going on, but knowledge to look beyond appearances and see the God of heaven loving us through His Son.