

Wealth Is But A Breath

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Date: 29 September 2024

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 5, starting at verse 8, and we're going to go to Ecclesiastes chapter 6, verse 12. We've been in this sermon series for a couple months now.

It's been a wonderful series, a humbling series, and it really is my joy and privilege to preach God's word to you. I say that to you every week, and I mean it every week.

It's an honor, and I can't believe that I get to pastor you guys and get paid for it. Serving God and getting paid for it, it's amazing.

Let me pray for the reading and preaching of God's word. Heavenly Father, you know that nobody sitting here needs any word from me.

They need a word from you. So we open up your word because we want to hear from you. We are clinging to your every word because man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

[1 : 39] Lord, you're in this sermon. So feed us, Father, now. Help us to behold the Jesus in all his glory, his love, his grace, his mercy, so that we might be humbled to live in a manner that pleases you, that we might be able to receive life humbly as a gift as you teach us to do so in this word in Ecclesiastes 5 and 6.

Give us listening ears, open hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please stand, and if you are able, in honor of God's word, as I read Ecclesiastes 5, 8 to 6, 12.

Amen. 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.

But this is gain for a land in every way, a king committed to cultivated fields. He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income.

This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them. And what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

[3 : 23] There is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun. Riches were kept by their owner to his hurt, and those riches were lost in a bad venture.

And he is a father of a son, but he has nothing in his hand. 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.

This also is a grievous evil. Just as he came, so shall he go. And what gain is there to him who toils for the wind? Moreover, all his days he eats in darkness, in much vexation and sickness and anger.

What I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot.

Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil, this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.

[4 : 39] There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind. A man to whom God gives wealth, possessions, and honor so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them.

This is vanity. It is a grievous evil. If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with life's good things, and he also has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he, for it comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered.

Moreover, it has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good, do not all go to the one place. 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 living?

Better is the sight of the eyes than the wondering of the appetite. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. 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 stronger than he.

[6 : 04] The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man? For who knows what is good for man while he lives the 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? This is God's holy and authoritative word. You may be seated. After many millennia of lived experience, we might expect humanity to have learned the lesson that wealth does not buy happiness, that it does not make people happy. But according to a survey conducted by a financial services company called Empower, still, to this day, six in ten Americans answer yes to that question, can money buy happiness?

Similarly, researchers at the University of California lost an annual survey every year. Guys, is my mic going in and out? Yes. Yeah. Yeah. So, you got another one?

Okay. Thank you, Gary.

[7 : 21] Similarly, researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, conduct an annual survey asking incoming college students what their highest priorities are, what their goals are, objectives for their time in college are.

And there's something that's been on the top or near the top of their priorities list every single year, and that is being very well off financially.

But Ecclesiastes 5 to 6 teaches us a truth that is far deeper and far wiser. It tells us to forsake the vain pursuit of wealth and enjoy life as a gift from God.

And there are two imposing rocks of reality upon which the preacher of Ecclesiastes builds his case. And these two twin truths are this. One, the uncertainty of wealth, and two, the certainty of death.

And we're going to explore those two things in turn. And the first reality is the uncertainty of wealth. Wealth is undependable for many reasons. And the first reason highlighted in this passage is injustice.

[8 : 27] It says in verse 8, The word oppression literally is robbery.

The preacher observes that the robbery of the poor by the powerful, by the ones who have authority over them, is all too common. It is the norm and not the exception. And therefore you should not find that to be remarkable.

You should not be amazed by it. Proverbs 10.15 says, A rich man's wealth is his strong city. The poverty of the poor is their ruin.

The rich use the resources at their disposal to protect themselves. They hire the best lawyers. They build for themselves literal fortresses sometimes on the highest hill of the city.

They take advantage of the poor. They can bribe the judges in their favor. The poor, on the other hand, are powerless.

[9 : 34] They have no such recourse. And so their own poverty becomes their ruin. They are more likely to be oppressed and violated because there's not much they can do about it. And the end of verse 8 gives a reason why this happens.

For the high official is watched by higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. The reason why there's this robbery of the poor throughout the world, and why that's allowed to go on, is because there is an official who is supposed to safeguard justice and righteousness who is corrupt.

Well, how does he get away with that? Well, because there's a higher official who's supposed to be keeping that official accountable, but he's corrupt too. So he watches his back.

They have each other's back, so to speak. So there's this hierarchy of impunity, which enables those in power to abuse their power without accountability. We see an example of this in 1 Kings 21.

King Ahab, he's the king of Israel, he covets this vineyard. He really likes his vegetable gardens. And he says, you know, that land looks really nice. And it's really close to my palace.

[10 : 45] I really want to grow my vegetable garden there. So he says, hey, give me that piece of land. Or you could sell it to me. The owner's name is Naboth, or Naboth.

And Naboth, remembering that these lands are ancestral lands that God has given to various tribes of Israel, and therefore are not meant to be sold outside of their tribe, refuses to relinquish his God-given property.

Says, this is not for sale. I can't give this up to you. And then Ahab goes home disappointed, and he's refusing to eat. And then his wife, the queen, the wicked queen Jezebel, sees him, and then she mocks him, saying, do you call yourself the king of Israel?

Get up and eat your food and cheer up. I will give you the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite. And then first she writes letters in the king's name to the elders and the leaders of the town that Naboth lived in, in the city.

He instructs them to convene a gathering, and at that gathering to seat Naboth at the head of the table. And then he tells them to hire some worthless men who will be false accusers and perjurers in that gathering to accuse Naboth of cursing the king and cursing God.

[12 : 02] They do that. They stone Naboth to death. And then she tells Ahab, arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money, for Naboth is not alive but dead.

The elders of the town were able to violate justice and righteousness and rob the poor because they had the backing of another higher official watching over them, namely King Ahab and Queen Jezebel.

Many poorer countries, if you read the news, throughout the world, they're run, they're basically narco-cleptocracies, basically governments that are heavily influenced by or run by those who are involved in the drug trade.

Gangs, so on. The closed electoral system rewards and keeps corrupt officials in power, and then these corrupt officials then use the justice system that is at their disposal to punish those who oppose them, the whistleblowers and honest members of the city and the media that cry out for justice.

Of course, wealthier countries are not immune to this problem. The International Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant for Vladimir Putin, which, of course, is symbolic at best.

[13 : 20] Most election observers note that at least 22 to 31.6 million votes are manipulated in Russian elections in recent years.

But there's this hierarchy of impunity with no accountability. Even in our country, right? We're witnessing Eric Adams, the mayor of New York City, being indicted, the first sitting mayor of New York City to be indicted.

The charges haven't been proven yet, and I don't presume that he is guilty, but they're accusing him of misappropriating more than 10 million in public funds during his election campaign in 2021 and receiving benefits from the Turkish government in return for favors that he was giving them in his official capacity.

We don't know if that really happened or not yet, but this is a reminder to us that these kind of things really happen, and they have happened before. In contrast to this reality of corruption, verse 9 says, but this is gain for a land in every way, a king committed to cultivated fields.

This is hard to translate, interpret, and many different interpretations have been proposed, but based on the context and the contrast from the high officials who pervert justice, the last clause seems to mean that a king who recognizes the importance of cultivated fields is good for the land.

[14 : 53] Unlike the high officials who oppress the poor and the weak, a king who recognizes that the food producers at the bottom of the societal hierarchy, the manual laborers, the farmers, the ruler who recognizes that these people are foundational for a healthy kingdom, a king who takes an interest in the cause of the common laborer, is gain for the land in every way.

I think we can take this interpretation even further. The last clause can be translated, a king who cultivates the field, which is the way the NASB translates it. A commander-in-chief who no longer marches out into battle with his soldiers, can forget the painful toll of war and the sacrifices that his men make daily in the field.

This is precisely what we see with King David in 2 Samuel 11. He remains in his comfortable palace in Jerusalem while his men are dying and shedding their blood for him. And because of that, he takes that for granted and he treats them like mere numbers, disposable numbers in his war game.

Similarly, a king who never cultivates the field can lose touch with the day-to-day realities of his subjects and servants.

But a king who gets his hands dirty once in a while, a king who surveys and familiarizes himself with the plight of his subjects, that kind of ruler is gain for the land in every way.

[16 : 24] This reminds me of the invaluable counsel that I received from David Powelson on pastoral counseling. He writes in one of his books, talking with people is the best way to measure the pulpit ministry's effectiveness.

Does what you know, believe, and preach actually help people? Talking one-to-one about what matters in life is the only way you'll ever really get to know people. And knowing people is the only way you'll ever learn to preach to them.

And then later he says, my second rule of thumb is that you should always be involved with a few people who are slow movers, with strugglers. The temptation is to counsel leader types, gifted people who want to grow, people who are a quick study, people who get it, educated, independent, competent people, influential people.

Such people often make for efficient counseling, though not necessarily. David Powelson here echoes the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 5.9. Are you a manager at your work?

Or are you a parent in the home? Or are you a professor at a school with people under your charge? If so, are you in touch with the day-to-day realities of the people that work for you?

[17 : 41] Do you actually know them? Do you understand their struggles? Do you see your authority as a means to serve them or as a means to get them to serve you?

So to summarize verses 8 and 9, rulers who use their positions and power for their personal benefit are bad for the land, but a ruler who seeks the benefits of the people who serve, that he serves, is good for the land.

And unfortunately, the latter is rare and the former is all too common, according to Ecclesiastes.

And it's this injustice of the world that robs the poor that makes the pursuit of wealth vain, futile.

But what about these people who have power and are oppressing people and robbing the poor and enriching themselves? Surely they're getting what they want and surely they must be satisfied, right?

No. Verses 10 to 12 tell us that even they are not satisfied. It says, He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income.

[18 : 46] This also is vanity. When goods increase, they increase who eat them. And what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? Sweet is the sleep of our laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

Ultimately, money is dissatisfying. He who loves money will not be satisfied with money. If you doubt this, take a look at this graph from the Wall Street Journal.

This was people's answer to a survey question. How much does your annual salary need to be for you to feel happy, to be less stressed? People who make \$25,000 a year said, Oh, I just need to make \$50,000 in order to be happy.

Okay, well, so then let's ask the people who make \$50,000 if they're happy. They say, No, no, I need to make \$75,000 in order to be happy. Well, okay, then let's ask the people who make \$75,000.

Maybe they're happy. They say, No, we need to make \$100,000 in order to be happy. Well, and then let's ask the people who make \$100,000. No, they say, No, we need to make \$150,000.

[19 : 53] And then people who make \$150,000 say they need to make \$200,000. And people who make \$200,000 say they need to make \$350,000. And it's not on this graph.

There's another survey that asked millionaires, Do you feel happy? Or how much money do you need to make in order to be happy? And they say, We need to make \$10,000,000 in order to be happy.

It's a never-ending hamster wheel. You think you're getting somewhere. You're spinning your wheel. But you're actually in the same exact spot you've always been at.

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income. This also is vanity. Once I make this much money, once I get to this stage of my career, once I get to, you fill in the blank, then I will finally be satisfied.

That is a pernicious lie that humanity has believed ever since the fall in the garden when Adam took that forbidden fruit. 17th century English pastor Jeremiah Burroughs distills the wisdom of God's

word when he writes this in his book, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.

[21 : 10] He says that the way to contentment is by subtraction, not by addition. What does he mean by that? We find satisfaction not by bringing our possessions up to the level of our desires, but by bringing our desires down to the level of our possessions.

By subtraction, not by addition. If you can't afford to take beach vacations in the Caribbean, then instead of trying to earn and earn and grind and grind so that you could afford a vacation in the Caribbean, learn to enjoy a vacation at Cape Cod.

Learn to enjoy Revere Beach. I love Revere Beach. It's a lot cleaner than it used to be.

If you desire fine dining and wine tasting at expensive restaurants, instead of trying to bring your wealth up to the level of your desire, learn to appreciate and enjoy the pleasures of simple food and drink that's at your dinner table.

Bring your desires down to match what you have because having more will not satisfy you. Verse 11 continues, When goods increase, they increase who eat them.

[22 : 32] And what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? The more money you make, the more things you find to spend money on. Now that you have so much money, things that you never used to notice catch your eyes.

Those luxury handbags and jewelry and perfumes and watches and cars. Now that you have so much money, you buy a bigger house.

And now that your house is so big, you need to hire someone to clean it for you. And now that you have so much money, you need a financial advisor that you need to pay a financial manager to invest your funds for you.

Now that you have so much money, you need a vault and then you need a security system. Now that you have such a high net worth, you need bodyguards. Now that you have so much money, like thousands of people or thousands of people come calling, asking every single day for donations to this cause and seed money for this company.

Now that you have so much money, there are people who want to sue you for various things to take your money. So now you need to pay for lawyers too. When goods increase, they increase who eat them.

[23 : 46] And what advantage has their owner but to see them with his eyes? When your wealth grows, the number of people who want a slice of that pie also grows. And instead of feasting on your pie with your mouth, you are left feasting on it with your eyes only.

As you look on as all these mouths are feeding on your pie. Wealth ultimately cannot satisfy us. not only does it fail to satisfy us, wealth also gives us indigestion and insomnia. Verse 12 says, sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

This is personal for me because it's not because she eats a lot.

My wife doesn't eat that much, but she does have a physical condition that has restricted blood flow in her body, so she often has indigestion. So I'm very often massaging her stomach at night so that she can sleep.

[24 : 56] She can't sleep after she eats. And most of us don't do too much manual labor. Manual labor, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have shared that.

And this is, sometimes you just have to say no to the thought that comes to your mind. And then, wait, I was talking to some people today. We don't do a lot of manual laboring.

Most of us sit in front of a computer all day. But when you've done hard labor, a hard day of good manual labor, let's say on the day we moved the Borens and Aubrey in, for example, like I remember Kevin, where's Kevin?

At the end of the day he worked for probably like eight hours straight. And he's just sitting there and he's like, I think this is the definition of a hard work day, of an honest day's work. And I bet you anything that he slept really well that night.

And that's the case. For all of us, we sleep well when we work with our hands. But the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep.

[25 : 57] This is literally true and figuratively true. If you have a full stomach, the undigested food can flow back into the esophagus and then it causes heartburn and acid reflux.

You guys have experienced this before. Makes you uncomfortable and you can't sleep. It makes you gassy and makes you feel bloated. And even if you do end up falling asleep because your body

is working so hard to digest all that food, you can't get into the deep REM cycles of sleep. So you don't wake up refreshed and rested. And figuratively, wealth of possessions means you have more to worry about. I have a friend who invested early in Bitcoin. And I told him that he must be quite happy with the returns that he has had from this investment. Bitcoin used to be worth less than a cent and now it's like \$65,000 per Bitcoin. But he told me something really interesting. He says it gives him, it nearly gives him heart attacks like every other day. Because now that he has so much money invested in it, like one day you gain tens of thousands of dollars and another day you lose tens of thousands of dollars and then you're just glued to the screen and checking the ups and downs and the fluctuations of the stock market. [27 : 18] You lose sleep. The full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep. I think the 19th century English pastor J.C. Ryle got this exactly right.

He says money in truth is one of the most unsatisfying of possessions. It takes away some cares no doubt but it brings with it quite as many cares as it takes away.

There is trouble in the getting of it. There is the anxiety in the keeping of it. There are the temptations in the use of it. There is the guilt in the abuse of it. There is a sorrow in the losing of it. There is a perplexity in the disposing of it. Two-thirds of all the strifes, quarrels, and lawsuits in the world arise from one simple cause. Money. That brings me to another related reason why the pursuit of wealth is vain.

The impermanence and the insecurity of wealth. He says in verses 13 to 14, there is a grievous evil that I have seen under the sun. Riches were kept by their owner to his hurt and those riches were lost in a bad venture.

[28 : 29] And he is a father of a son but he has nothing in his hand. Some people gain wealth and try to keep wealth at great cost to themselves. Sometimes even at the cost of their integrity, at the cost of their relationships, at the cost of their health.

That's what's in view here. Riches were kept by their owner to his hurt. But despite the fact that he made so many sacrifices and hurt himself in the process of gaining and keeping this wealth, they're lost in a bad venture.

He has nothing to leave behind for his son. I remember after what we now refer to as the Great Recession of 2008, 2009, there was a string of suicides, dozens of high-profile suicides by formerly extremely wealthy people who lost a fortune during the Great Recession.

Even when you try to grasp hold of it, sometimes chasing after wealth is like chasing after wind. It just slips through your fingers. As verses 15, 16 say, 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. This also is a grievous evil. Just as he came, so shall he go. What gain is there to him who toils for the wind? We don't stand to gain anything from our toil on earth because in the end we can't take anything with us.

[30 : 05] And not only is there no gain for our toil at the end of our lives, throughout our lives there is much difficulty, as it says in verse 17, all his day he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger, toiling and toiling to earn and earn.

But why do we toil so for wealth that we cannot keep? Naked come, naked go. Zero in, zero out. That's the reality. Life is like a balanced budget that always ends in zero. I know that's what you wish your budget was like sometimes, but life is like that.

It always ends as a balanced budget in zero. There's never a surplus. There's no carryover into the following fiscal year. Death is a thick black sharpie that zeroes everything out at the end of your life. And we never know when death will come. That's the point of the parable of the rich fool, right, that Jesus tells in Luke 12. This rich man has so much produce that he doesn't have enough barns to keep all his wealth.

[31 : 14] So he's like, okay, well then, I'll just tear down all my barns and build new, bigger ones so that I can keep all my wealth to myself. And then God says to him, fool, this night your soul is required of you and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?

So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God. I don't know if arcades still use this. Chuck and Cheeses are still around, right?

They use these Chuck and Cheeses coins, arcade coins. You guys know what I'm talking about? If you go to an arcade and they have arcade coins, you have to exchange your money because your money is not, you can't use your money in the arcade.

You need to exchange your money, pay money to get these arcade coins. And with those arcade coins, you can do many things. You can play games and you can buy food. But imagine, you know this arcade is shutting down tomorrow and you've exchanged all of your money for this arcade coin. Would you keep that? It's going to lose all of its value when that arcade closes. All of it. It's expiring currency.

[32 : 28] And that's what money on earth is like. All of it. All the money on earth is expiring currency. And yet, we like this foolish kid in the arcade just hoards this arcade coins.

Like, it's going to take us somewhere when it's all coming due. That's why God tells us not to store up treasures on earth, but to store up treasures in heaven where it does not rust.

It's not stolen by thieves. Let Job's profession in Job 121 be the starting point of your perspective on money, your relationship with money.

He says, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. It is the Lord's prerogative to give and to take away and he has ordained that we can't take anything out with us when we die.

If that's the starting point of your relationship with money, then you will have God's wisdom to guide you in all your earning and saving and spending and you will forsake the vain pursuit of wealth.

[33 : 39] That brings me to my second main point, the certainty of death. Wealth is uncertain, but death is certain. He says in chapter 6, verse 7, all the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.

Proverbs 27, 20 says, Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied and never satisfied are the eyes of man. These are two things that are never satisfied, our desires in life and death.

Life never gives us enough, we're never satisfied. Death never stops taking enough. We always die. The grave, like our mouths, never stops being hungry.

In light of this, what advantage has the wise man over the fool? The preacher asks in verse 8, And what does the poor man who knows how to conduct himself before the living?

In other words, what good is wisdom when both the wise and the fool die in the end? There's a slight qualification in verse 8. Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite.

[34 : 46] Remember from verse 8 that the preacher is here comparing the wise man and the fool. The sight of the eyes here is a metonymy for wisdom, the wisdom that the wise man has.

And the going of the appetite or the wandering of the appetite represents the hedonistic fool's life driven by appetite. And the preacher admits here, he qualifies his thesis statement a bit, saying that it is better to have the sight of the eyes.

It is better to be wise than to be a fool who is driven by his appetite. Nevertheless, he concludes, the wise and the fool both end up in the grave.

That's why he says in verse 9, this also is vanity and a striving after wind. This parallels Ecclesiastes 2, 13 to 15, then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly.

Wisdom is better than folly. As there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceive that the same event happens to all of them.

[35 : 52] Then I said in my heart, what happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise? And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. Imagine two trekkers who are stuck in the wilderness.

One person has eyes, he could see, the other person is blind. The one, the trekker who can see can avoid the bears you see or if you're like Josh you can run into them and if you're, or they could avoid the pitfalls, they could cross the streams but the blind trekker is falling over root and rock and scraped all over.

Which is better? Well obviously the one who has eyes is better. it's better to navigate the difficulties and the complexities of life with wisdom to be able to see where you're going and to understand what's happening that is better.

But this is the kicker. They're both gonna die in the wilderness. So why?

What's the ultimate benefit of wisdom over folly? Death is coming for us all. That's the point. Verses 10 to 12 continues this line of thought.

[37 : 19] 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 stronger than he. The more words the more vanity and what is the advantage to man for who knows what is good for man while he lives 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.

The expression whatever has come to be has already been named that phrase naming is used in Psalm 147.4 and Isaiah 40.26 to refer to how God has determined the number of the stars and has named them given to all of them their names.

Scientists estimate that there are 200 billion trillion stars in the known universe the observable universe which is about 10 times the number of cups of water in all of the earth's ocean.

Imagine moving all the water in the ocean with a measuring cup. Yet God has numbered all of those stars. God has named all of those stars and add to that the fact that these stars are light years away from us.

The constellation Andromeda is 2.5 million light years away. But we can see it with our eyes. That means that light's been traveling for 2.5 million years at the speed of light.

[38 : 48] That's how far away it is and that's how big this universe is. And God knows all the stars. He's named all the stars. He has numbered all the stars and he has numbered all our days and he has numbered all the times of our lives.

Who are we? Insignificant creatures that we are to try to take control of those times. And that's the point he's making here.

He is not, man is not able to dispute with one stronger than he. Who is the one stronger than us?

It's the Lord. Job says in Job 9.19, if it is a contest of strength, behold, God is mighty.

If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him? Our lives pass like a shadow and it is not our place as finite creatures to grasp the infinite mind of God.

So he calls for surrender. So if that's the case, how then shall we live? That's the question that the preacher asks in the middle of this passage. In chapter 5, verses 18 to 20 and chapter 6, verses 1 to 6, there are two contrasting pictures, profiles, and they are connected by this key word, enjoy, or joy, rejoice.

[40 : 13] Both sections begin with what the preacher has observed and it begins with the phrase I have seen and then both sections concern someone to whom God has given wealth and possessions.

You can see that in 5.19 and 6.2. However, there is a crucial difference between these two people whom God has blessed with possessions and wealth. He says in 5.19 that God has given one man a power to enjoy his wealth and possessions.

But in contrast, 6.2 says that God does not give the other man power to enjoy his wealth and possessions. And this makes all the difference. It says of the man who doesn't know how to enjoy his wealth in chapter 6, verses 3 to 6, verse 3.

No matter how long you live your life, even if you live a thousand years twice over, and even if you father a hundred children who will live on after you to follow your legacy or whatever you want, the destination on our train ticket is death.

It doesn't change. We all go to the one place. So what does living a long life and having children who can continue your legacy really accomplish? Whether your train ride is one hour long or one week long, you're all going to the same place.

[42 : 00] In fact, the preacher contends that a stillborn child is better off than the rich man who does not know how to enjoy life's good things. They both end up in the same place, the grave, but the stillborn child has been spared the vexations and the injustices, the evils of this world.

the stillborn child finds the rest that ever eludes the rich man in his life. But look at verses 18 to 20. This is the contrast. Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him. For this is his lot.

Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil. This is the gift of God.

For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart. A man who is able to enjoy the gifts that God has given him is fortified against the evils and the vicissitudes of life because it keeps him preoccupied.

[43 : 12] This is the third of five Carpe Diem passages we've encountered so far in the book of Ecclesiastes. Carpe Diem is a Latin phrase that means seize the day and it's an exhortation to make use of the present opportunities and to enjoy today, life today while it still lasts instead of counting on tomorrow which may never come.

This is different from hedonism which pursues pleasure as the highest goal. In this Ecclesiastes worldview our highest good is God and because we have God we are enabled to enjoy the good gifts of life that he gives.

He is the giver of every good and perfect gift. The wisdom of Ecclesiastes counsels us to receive our lot in life as a gift of God rather than striving in vain for gain.

If you've been with us in this series you know the word gain or profit is important in the book of Ecclesiastes. It's a key word and it's related to the word advantage that occurs several times in our passage.

We humans have an innate desire to make a profit to earn something and to have something to show for our labors but because we live in a world that is mere breath that ends in death there's nothing actually to be gained.

[44 : 38] We tend to treat life as a means for gain as a means to gain control as a means for self advancement to get ahead of other people. We tend to use the world around us as leverage for attaining our own goals and the relationships that we have around us as stepping stones we can step on to build ourselves up and to lift ourselves up to gear up for the next big thing and to greater things.

But it's all futile because it all ends in death. What if God gives us these things not to be used or mastered but simply to be enjoyed?

What if our work and indeed life itself are not something to take advantage of something with which to turn a profit but a gift that you freely receive and enjoy?

this is the main point of the book of Ecclesiastes. We're all on a hamster wheel. It tells us again and again we're all on a hamster wheel but if we know that we are on a hamster wheel then you're not gonna burn yourself out on that wheel.

You can take some time to slow down and rest. We can take ourselves less seriously. This is what I've been calling the freedom of insignificance.

[46 : 02] The humility of wisdom. Instead of pounding coffee for that caffeine kick you can actually maybe slow down and enjoy a nice cup of pour over.

Instead of yes we're all on that train the destination on the ticket is death but if you know that you don't drive the train you're sitting on the train as you're going on the train then you can actually enjoy the scenery.

If you know that you're on a hamster wheel if you know this then you're not gonna see all of your neighbors and peers and friends and colleagues as people to step on and to get ahead of your competition.

Instead you can love your neighbor and you can actually pause and stop on the way to help the Samaritan. I'm naturally very bad at this so it's okay if you're feeling really bad about yourself right now.

I'm with you. I understand. That's why in his kindness God gave me Hannah as my wife. I have to make up for what I said earlier. I was a this was actually planned I was gonna say this.

[47 : 31] I was a college student who survived on a diet of rice potatoes and eggs most of my study abroad year. so much for enjoying my meals. No this is fuel to get by life right.

I mean that's my that was my perspective in college. I was very utilitarian my outlook needed. Most of the clothes I owned were plain white t-shirts so I never have to think about what I'm gonna wear. Well I'm wearing that same thing again. And I was so very stingy. Scrupulously avoided spending money wherever I could. But Hannah really helped me to loosen up quite a bit.

She has taught me to enjoy good food. She's taught me to dance which I would never do in my younger self. She taught me to hold my money with open hands instead of with clenched fists.

Daniel's visiting. Daniel's really good at that too. He's probably bought me more food than anybody I know.

[48 : 45] Behold what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him for this is his lot.

forsaking the vain pursuit of wealth we should enjoy life as a gift from God. He's so wise.

Social scientist Elizabeth Dunn writes this in her book Happy Money the Science of Smarter Spending have you guys read that anybody? You guys don't read self-help books. That's not a bad thing.

I think that's good. Yeah. The people who know how to she writes that people who know how to spend money for experiences that they enjoy tend to be happier in general than people who try to accumulate things people who buy things.

She writes quote stop trying to get more money our goal is to help you use the money you have to get more happiness. In other words don't forget to enjoy what you have in your pursuit of more.

[49 : 50] According to neuroscientist Kent Berridge his research published in the Journal of American Psychology are wanting something and are liking and enjoying something are mediated by different circuits in the brain.

So they actually function independently. In other words you wanting something and getting what you want has nothing to do with your actual enjoyment and liking something.

so don't get lost in pursuing your wants and forget to enjoy what you already have the things that you like.

Here is the best this is they published this as like the latest research. It's been in here for 3,000 years. But the Bible of course goes far beyond mere self-help advice which when taken to their logical conclusions still ring hollow in light of the penetrating observations of the despair of life. What's missing in these scientific papers and self-help books is God. we have something we can enjoy that goes far beyond eating and drinking.

[51 : 10] We have this week three days of prayer and fasting that we do every month. It's a great time to take time to fast and to pray especially with significant life events happening to many of our members.

Praying for Jenny praying for the Bournes and Jesus said this about fasting that man does not live by bread alone but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

And then Jesus in his last supper with his disciples he broke bread and he poured wine which is what we do in our celebration of the Lord's supper and he said this is my body which is for you and this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Jesus is the word of God that we live by. Jesus is the bread of life that we enjoy above all other breads and that's why Paul commands the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord Jesus in Philippians 4 to enjoy the Lord Jesus and that's why because Paul enjoys the Lord Jesus because he eats the bread and drinks the cup.

He says I've learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low I know how to abound in any and every circumstance I've learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

[52 : 35] Here's something that people can't do people of this world without God cannot do because if you want to enjoy the things you have you still have to have something to enjoy don't you? But if you have Jesus you can be poor you can be rich you can be low you can be high you can be sick you can be healthy and you can still rejoice in Jesus you can still enjoy Jesus whatever my lot my heart has learned to say it is well it is well with my soul why?

Because Jesus laid down his life for us on the cross why did he die for our sins on the cross we read earlier that Jesus became poor so that we in our poverty might become rich Jesus died on the cross for our sins so that he can give to us a heavenly inheritance that is imperishable that is unfading kept in heaven for us as it says in 1 Peter 1 because we have that we can always rejoice in the Lord the Westminster shorter catechism asks what is the chief end of man and it answers man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever that is our lot as Christians and that is our greatest privilege so let's enjoy

Jesus and forsake the vain pursuit of wealth let's pray together