

Teach Us, *Qohelet* (Part 10)

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

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Our teacher *Qohelet* lived a life full of wealth and achievement, yet in the end he found that everything he attained did not bring lasting fulfillment and satisfaction, but rather it led to frustration. Anything we strive for in this world is satisfying only for a moment, then it wears off and we look for something else to strive for. This is why we get frustrated. This fundamental truth of human nature is something video game creators take advantage of. They make us feel accomplished by making it easy to level up at the beginning. Once we have experienced the short-lived satisfaction of leveling up, we want to go back for more. But the game gets harder and harder, and we get frustrated. Rather than give up, we tend to strive harder to gain that satisfaction we long for. The frustration and futility is like that of an infant who knows what he wants but cannot communicate it to his parents.

In Ecclesiastes 5, *Qohelet* talked about the meaninglessness of wealth and how it changes people. Money makes people do questionable things. The more wealth you have, the more you want. But the more you get, the more stress you have. And from my experience, the more you have, the less generous you tend to be. In RAV I saw a little girl with nothing who was still willing to share with her siblings. Yet here we have everything and our children squabble over everything. When we have more, instead of giving more, we hoard more. The more you have, the more you have to guard.

Now in chapter 6, *Qohelet* continues talking about wealth. The expression “wealth and possessions” in 6:2 links this chapter with the previous chapter (5:19). But this time, the message is that wealth adds to the frustration that we all already experience from the world because it makes you long and strive for money. Yet those who have wealth are still frustrated because they cannot enjoy it for long. When v. 2 says a stranger enjoys a man’s riches, it’s referring to what happens to your wealth when you die. This idea is hinted at again in v. 3, which talks about receiving a proper burial. The theme of death, which *Qohelet* discussed in previous chapters, is brought up again in the context of wealth. The idea here is that we cannot enjoy our wealth for long because we all die and must pass our wealth to another. Life is short. Many strive for wealth their whole lives, and few attain it. Even though such people can gain more wealth, they can’t gain more time on this earth to enjoy it. This is the frustration of wealth.

Another aspect of the frustration we experience is that of unmet expectation. We think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, but when we get there we find that it's just turf or that the next yard over is the one with the really green grass. We talk about expectations a lot in pre-marital counseling. After I got married, I found myself frustrated because I was used to having my sister decorate the house for Christmas, and now nobody decorated our house. When things fail to meet our expectations, we get frustrated. And this causes us to constantly strive for satisfaction in things that cannot satisfy. At work we strive for higher pay and title. In our business we strive for growth and success. At school we strive for better grades. In sports we strive for better scores and to beat our personal records. We strive for a spouse and to have children. When we have children, we long for them to grow up so they can take care of themselves. Then, when they do, we long for the days when they were young and adorable. In terms of our health, we strive for our ideal weight and cholesterol. We strive for healing from disease and infirmity. Even in church we strive to improve programs and logistics. It's not wrong to try to improve our circumstances, but we must understand that attaining what we strive for will not give us satisfaction, because satisfaction comes from the Lord. In 2 Samuel 11, David had power, loyalty, and popularity, but he was unsatisfied and strived to have Bathsheba. In Matthew 26 and John 12 Judas strived for money by betraying Jesus, yet when he received it he was unsatisfied and committed suicide out of remorse and despair. Buddha was right about the fact that suffering comes from desires. But he was wrong about the solution. We cannot remove our desires by meditation, because we are all irreparably sin cursed. We can only redirect our desires to the true source of satisfaction. This world cannot satisfy, so look to the One who transcends this world, the One who promises an eternity of satisfaction.