

## STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES “THE MID-LIFE CRISIS”

### STUDY NUMBER FIVE – Snared by Materialism: The more and More Money Madness 5:8 – 6:12

#### TEXT:

- v. 8 If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things: for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still.
- v. 9 The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.
- v.10 Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.
- v.11 As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?
- v.12 The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.
- v.13 I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner.
- v.14 or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him.
- v.15 Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand.
- v.16 This too is a grievous evil: As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?
- v.17 All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger.
- v.18 The I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him – for this is his lot.
- v.19 Moreover, when God gives any wealth and possessions and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God.
- v.20 He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.
- 6:v. 1 I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men:
- v. 2 God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.
- v. 3 A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.
- v. 4 It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded.
- v. 5 Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man–
- v. 6 even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?
- v. 7 All man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied.
- v. 8 What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?

v. 9 Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

v.10 Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with one who is stronger than he.

v.11 The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?

v.12 For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?

### INTRODUCTION:

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

With these thoughts in mind, the writer begins to explore life with all of its different facets. In chapter 1 we found the foundation for the mid-life crisis in asking the question, “Is that all there is?” He makes three observations:

1. He sees no gain in his labor.
2. He. See nothing new under the sun.
3. He sees no remembrance by one generation of another.

In study #2 Solomon learns that the pursuit of pleasure will only leave you thirsty. There is no real purpose in becoming a workaholic and there is no lasting satisfaction in possessions and pleasures. Above all of that, there is the frustration of leaving everything you have acquired to others who will not appreciate it.

In the third chapter Solomon is confronted with the sovereign purpose of God. He finds that God has ordered our lives and there is a time and a season for every activity under the sun.

In the fourth chapter Solomon witnesses the oppression of others by those who are more powerful. He observes that two or three together are better than being alone. Accepting the counsel and advice of others is a wise path to follow. He then advises that you are not to be overly zealous in your religious endeavors while you are under stress.

This brings us now to study #5 “Snared by Materialism: The More and More Money Madness” chapter 5:8 – 6:12. This particular section could also be titled the “Misfortunes of Having a Fortune.”

More than a century ago, on the sunbaked prairie west of Topeka in Kansas, there stood an abandoned farmhouse. Next to it, in a yard overgrown with weeds, was a weather-beaten old pump from whose handle hung a tin bucket full of water. The well beneath the pump was deep. The water was cold and deliciously pure.

In those years before and after the War Between the States, thousands of settlers headed west in open and covered wagons that contained all they owned.

The pump next to the old farmhouse became a very important watering stop for the thirsty travelers and their animals.

And as the wagons turned into the yard, and the settlers wet their lips in anticipation of a cool, thirst-quenching drink of water, they saw the crudely lettered sign beside the pump: "Please, friend, don't drink the water in the bucket. If you do, your thirst will be quenched – but all who follow you will go away thirsty. The water in the bucket must be used to prime the pump. Every drop is needed. After you prime the pump and get all the water you need, kindly refill the bucket and leave it behind so others can get water, too.

Although an endless parade of thirsty human beings and their animals drank from that pump on the blazing Kansas prairie for nearly three decades..."no one ever drank the priming water from the bucket. Each traveler, no matter how hot and thirsty, took the chance and poured every drop of the precious water from the bucket into the top of the pump to make it work and this went on for years!

We have already learned that a man in mid-life views life selfishly rather than socially. He views life as being apart from God rather than controlled by Him. And he views the grave as the end. With this kind of thinking you set the stage for a love of self and of materialism. Money is OK in the life of a person who is thinking of others. But once he becomes selfish, it then becomes a snare.

Dobson in his book Straight Talk to Men and Their Wives says the following: "Let me conclude this discussion by listing 15 quotations which focus on the subject of money. Two are from my pen and others are scripture verses or adaptations from various sources. Perhaps you will find them helpful in reinforcing your own system of values:

1. Everything you own means that much more trouble for you. (A Chinese Proverb)
2. The amount of a man's wealth consists in the number of things he can do without. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)
3. The best way to live happily ever after is not to be after too much. (Anonymous)
4. Desire is like a river. As long as it flows within the banks of God's will, be the current strong or weak, all is well. But when it flows over those boundaries and seeks other channels, then disaster lurks in the rampage. (James Dobson, Sr.)
5. For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul. (Jesus in Mark 8:36)
6. The only thing you can take to heaven with you is your children and others you have told about Christ. (Anonymous)
7. The love of money is the root of all evil. (I Timothy 6:10)
8. The greatest secret of life is to spend it on something that will outlast it. (Anonymous)
9. God is entitled to a portion of our income, not because He needs it but because we need to give it. (James Dobson, Jr.)
10. Why spend your money on foodstuffs that don't give you strength? Why pay for groceries that don't do you any good? Listen, and I'll tell you where to get good food that fattens up the soul. (Isaiah 55:2, The Living Bible)

11. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. (I Timothy 6:9)
12. Such is the human race. Often it does seem a pity that Noah and his party didn't miss the boat. (Mark Twain)
13. A person brings nothing into this world and takes nothing out of it. Considering the kind of world it is, he is lucky to break even. (Anonymous)
14. There are said to be seven ages of man:
  - First age – a child sees the earth
  - Second age – he wants it
  - Third age – he hustles to get it
  - Fourth age – he decides to be satisfied with about half of it
  - Fifth age – he would be satisfied with less than half of it
  - Sixth age – he is now content to possess a 2x6 foot section of it
  - Seventh age – he gets it (Anonymous)
15. I have concluded that the accumulation of wealth, even if I could achieve it is an insufficient reason for living. When I reach the end of my days, a moment or two from now, I must look backward on something more meaningful than the pursuit of houses and land and machines and stocks and bonds. Nor is fame of any lasting benefit. I will consider my earthly existence to have been wasted unless I can recall a loving family, a consistent investment in the lives of people and an earnest attempt to serve the God who made me. Nothing else makes much sense. (James Dobson, Jr.)

v. 8 If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things: for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still.

Solomon says we should not be surprised when justice and rights are denied to the poor in a district. There is this constant power struggle going on among men.

Senator Mark O. Hatfield, in a speech delivered at a Chicago prayer breakfast in May, 1973, declared that the “more prestige and power a man gains, the harder it is for him to admit he is wrong. He also tends to lose an awareness of his culpability before God.” The Oregon Statesman said that “whenever power becomes the aim of a man's life, he unconsciously places himself above the laws of God and his fellow men.” The senator urged Christians to be aware of these perils of leadership and to intercede in prayer for all who carry great responsibility in business, economics and government. He reiterated his conviction that every man who has a prominent position is under the continual temptation to use all means available, both lawful and unlawful to maintain and augment his power and prestige. He is in a place of grave moral danger.

Hatfield, in his book Between a Rock and a Hard Place, makes some further very interesting observations with regard to this matter of the use of power. “No longer could I define leadership in terms of holding positions of power. Further, power in its truest sense was not political muscle influence and public prestige. I was coming to a whole new understanding of what power truly is from a spiritual perspective. Service to

others, solely for their own behalf and even entailing deep sacrifice is the true essence of leadership and the ultimate form of power. There is a power in servanthood which transcends all notions of power, sought after so avidly in the secular political sphere of life. All this is evidenced most clearly in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Regardless of one's own personal religious beliefs, anyone would have to conclude that this man exercised a form of power which changed totally the course of history. Yet, what was the nature of that power? What was the style of his leadership? It was a form of seeming powerlessness, expressed in self-sacrificial love and service on the behalf of others. His leadership was the surrendering of his personal prerogatives, the giving up of his ego. It was just the opposite of what the world estimates true leadership to be. His power consisted wholly in his radical faithfulness to a vision. He called this vision the Kingdom of God. And he defined this calling as doing his Father's will. His method for accomplishing these ends was not to seek public acclaim or devise a calculated strategy. But rather to surrender in utter faithfulness to God's will, exemplifying through a total self-giving love the heart and the message of his mission. The Christian is committed to molding his or her life to Christ. We are to seek his power and to follow his style of leadership. This means washing another's feet, laying down one's life for his friends and loving one's enemies. The politician who follows Christ is in no way exempted from obeying all that has been commanded. He or she is called to be a servant leader. Self-preservation is no longer the key motive in all political activities. Rather, it becomes the service of human need and prophetic faithfulness to a vision of God's will being done on earth as it is in heaven."

Richard J. Foster in his book Celebration of Discipline points out, "Learn the lesson that if you are to do the work of a prophet, what you need is not a scepter but a hoe. Bernard of Clairvaux - As the cross is the sign of submission, so the towel is the sign of service. When Jesus gathered his disciples for the Last Supper, they were having trouble over who was the greatest. This was no new issue for them. And an argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. Whenever there is trouble over who is the greatest, there is trouble over who is the least. That is the crux of the matter for us, isn't it? Most of us know we will never be the greatest, just don't let us be the least. Gathered at the Passover Feast the disciples were keenly aware that someone needed to wash the others' feet. The problem was that the only people who washed feet were the least. So there they sat, feet caked with dirt. It was such a sore point that they were not even going to talk about it. No one wanted to be considered the least. Then Jesus took a towel and a basin and so redefined greatness."

But when we choose to be a servant, we give up the right to be in charge. There is a great freedom in this. If we voluntarily choose to be taken advantage of, then we cannot be manipulated. When we choose to be a servant, we surrender the right to decide who and when we will serve. We become available and vulnerable.

There is the service of small things. Like Dorcas, we find ways to make coats and garments for the widows. The following is a true story: As I was in the frantic final throes of writing my doctrinal dissertation, I received a phone call from a friend. His wife had taken the car and he wondered if I could take him on a number of errands. Trapped, I consented, inwardly cursing my luck. As I ran out the door, I grabbed

Bonhoefer's Life Together, thinking that I might have an opportunity to read in it. Through each errand I inwardly fretted and fumed at the loss of precious time. Finally, at a supermarket, the final stop, I waved my friend on, saying I would wait in the car. I picked up my book, opened it to the marker and read these words: "The second service that one should perform for another in a Christian community is that of active helpfulness. This means initially simple assistance in trifling external matters. There is a multitude of these things wherever people live together. Nobody is too good for the meanest service. One who worries about the loss of time that such petty, outward acts of helpfulness entail is usually taking the importance of his own career too seriously. Francis de Salles says that "the great virtues and the small fidelities are like sugar and salt. Sugar may have a more exquisite taste but its use is less frequent. Salt is found everywhere. The great virtues are a rare occurrence. The ministry of small things is a daily service. Large tasks require great sacrifice for a moment. Small things require constant sacrifice."

v. 9 The increase from the land is taken by all: the king himself profits from the fields.

Solomon points up the fact that living off of the land is something that everyone does, even the king himself profits from the fields.

v.10 Whoever loves money never has money enough: whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.

Charles Bridges points out, "'Could you,' says a lively expositor, 'change the solid earth into a single lump of gold and drop it into the gaping mouth of avarice. It would only be a crumb of transient comfort, a cordial drop, enabling it to cry a little louder, give, give.' So true is it that a man's life, his real comfort of life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. Nature is content with little; grace with less; but lust with nothing. Silver can neither give peace nor make up for the loss of it. Be it however remembered that the evil lies in the love, not in the possession, of silver."

J. Vernon McGee points out, "This brings us to a new section in Solomon's experiments to find satisfaction in life. As we have seen, he tried science, the study of natural laws. He tried wisdom and philosophy, pleasure and materialism. He tried living for the now. He tried fatalism. He tried egoism, living for self. Then, of all things, he tried religion. Now we will see Solomon engage in another experiment. Solomon was in a position to pursue and enjoy wealth better than anyone else. He was probably the richest man who has ever been on this earth. He gave himself over to the accumulation of gold and he could buy anything that he wanted. The riches of Solomon was the factor that finally brought the downfall of the nation. The greed of the surrounding nations was aroused. They wanted to move in to get some of that wealth. God had put up a wall of protection around Israel but that wall crumbled and God allowed the nations to come into Israel and help themselves."

Cox points out, "Of course, Solomon does not mean to imply that every man of business degenerates into a miserly skeptic, whose worship is a formulated hypocrisy and whose life is haunted with saddening apprehensions and misfortune. No doubt, there were

then, as there are now, many men of business who were wise enough to take pleasure in all their labors, to cast their burden of care on him, and whose care stand both tomorrow and today. Men to whom worship was a calming and strengthening communion with the Father of their spirits and who advance through toil to worthy or even noble ends. He means simply that these are the perils to which all men of business are exposed and to which they fall so soon as their devotion to its affairs grows excessive.”

### I Timothy 6:6 – 17

“But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world so that, as a result, we can take nothing out of it. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who are desiring to be rich fall into temptation and a snare and many useless and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For a root of all the evils is the love of money, which certain ones in reaching for it have been led astray from the faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. But as for you, O man of God, be fleeing these things. But be going after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and confess the good confession before many witnesses. Verse 17: To those who are wealthy in the present age (or the now generation) charge them not to be proud, neither to have their hopes set upon the uncertainty of wealth, but upon God the One who is continually providing us all things abundantly for our enjoyment. To be doing good, to be wealthy in good works, to be generous, sharers with others.”

v.11 As goods increase so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes on them?

Solomon speaks of the frustration of wealth in the sense that the more you get, the more there are that consume them. And then he asks the question: What benefit are they to the owner except to feast his eyes upon them?

Money talks, we have been told since childhood. Listen to this dollar speak. You hold me in your hand and call me yours, yet may I not as well call you mine? See how easily I rule you. To gain me you would all but die. I am impersonal as rain, essential as water. Without me men in institutions would die. Yet I do not hold the power of life for them. I am futile without the stamp of your desire. I go nowhere unless you send me. I keep strange company. For me men mock, love and scorn character. Yet I am appointed to the service of saints, to give education to the growing mind and food to the starving bodies of the poor. My power is terrific. Handle me carefully and wisely lest you become my servant, rather than I yours.

Will Rogers says, “Too many people spend money they haven’t earned to buy things they don’t want, to impress people they don’t like.”

It is recorded of one of America’s richest men that before he died, he said to a friend. “I don’t see what good it does me, all this money that you say is mine. I can’t eat it, can’t spend it, in fact, I never saw it. And I never had it in my hand for a moment. I dress no

better than my private secretary and cannot eat as much as my coachman. I live in a big servant's boardinghouse, have dyspepsia, cannot drink champagne, and most of my money is in the hands of others, who use it mainly for their own benefit."

Benjamin Franklin said, "Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. There is nothing in its nature to produce happiness. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of its filling a vacuum, it makes one. If it satisfies one want, it doubles and trebles that want another way. That was a true proverb of the wise man. Rely upon it. Better is little with a fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith."

v. 12 The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep.

As the laborer works from day to day, he acquires funds to buy food and take care of his family. But the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep. He is constantly faced with the problems of investment and of continuing pressure to acquire still more.

v.13 I have seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner.

v.14 or wealth lost through some misfortune, so that when he has a son there is nothing left for him.

The grievous evil that is described by Solomon here is in contrast. In verse 13 it is wealth which is hoarded and in verse 14 it is wealth which is lost through some misfortune.

In the Tyler Morning Telegraph of October 14, 1980 an article called "Beggar Leaves a Fortune" appeared: Gorduno, Switzerland – "Maddalena Borella lived like a beggar. She never washed or changed her clothes and slept on straw in a broken-down hut. Local children in Gorduno, a village near the town of Bellinzona in the Italian-speaking southern part of Switzerland, were afraid of the 88-year-old woman. They called her a witch. Last January, Maddalena collapsed on the road. Doctors said she was weak because she hardly ate, just one small meal a day. The old woman was placed in a home for the aged after hospital treatment but she died in April. The hut was sealed and authorities began searching for the only relative, a nephew living in the United States. The nephew has now been traced and authorities went through the hut to see what, if anything, was of value. They found a bank savings book showing that Maddalena had \$312,000 in an account. There was also the key to a safe deposit box which was found to hold gold coins worth \$1.25 million dollars."

A museum in Deadwood, South Dakota, displays this inscription left by a beleaguered prospector: "I lost my gun, I lost my horse. I am out of food. The Indians are after me but I've got all the gold I can carry."

Whereas wealth is hoarded in verse 13, it is lost through some misfortune in verse 14, so that when he has a son, there is nothing left for him.



Years ago a social event of state-wide interest took place in Colorado, the wedding of Charles Tabor, a pioneer millionaire miner to Baby Doe. Tabor had divorced his wife, that he might marry the young beautiful and popular socialite. It was a gala occasion. One source of Tabor's wealth was the Matchless Mine. For a while things were rosy and pleasant for the newlyweds. Then reverses came. Tabor lost his vast fortune and succumbed to mortal illness. Before his death he said to his bride, "Cling to the Matchless Mine." He felt that the mine would stage a comeback. She took his advice but the mine didn't stage the anticipated comeback. She spent the last 36 years of her life in poverty waiting for the mine to bring her wealth and restore her to her former position. She waited in vain. She died in poverty and without friends. Her confidence was misplaced.

v.15 Naked a man comes from his mother's womb, and as he comes, so he departs. He takes nothing from his labor that he can carry in his hand.

Someone has said there is no armored car in a funeral procession.

Luke 12:19, 20 "And I will say to my soul, Thou hast much goods laid up for many years. Take thine ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee. Then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

Solomon has already spoken of the frustration of acquiring wealth back in chapter 2:18 when he says, "I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me."

Job 1:21 "And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

He always said he would retire when he had made a million clear. And so he toiled into the dusk, from day to day, from year to year. At last he put his ledgers up and laid his stock reports aside, And when he started out to live, he found he had already died.

v.16 This too is a grievous evil. As a man comes, so he departs, and what does he gain, since he toils for the wind?

Back in verse 13 he mentioned a grievous evil of wealth hoarded and wealth lost. And now, here in verse 16, this too is a grievous evil: that as a man comes, so he departs. And then he asks the question: What does he gain, since he toils for the wind?

v.17 All his days he eats in darkness, with great frustration, affliction and anger.

The days that he lives he eats in darkness, but he has three friends:

1. Frustration
2. Affliction
3. Anger

Someone has said, “Money will buy a bed but not sleep; books but not brains; food but not appetite; finery but not beauty; a house but not a home; medicine but not health; luxuries but not culture; amusement but not happiness.

Oftentimes the most discontented and fearful people are those who have great riches. They live in constant fear of being used or harassed and pressured into situations where the wealth might be used for personal gain.

v.18 Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him – for this is his lot.

Kidner points out, “At first sight this may look like the mere praise of simplicity and moderation but, in fact, the key word is ‘God’ and the secret of life held out to us is openness to him, a readiness to take what comes to us as heaven-sent, whether it is toil or wealth or both. This is more than good and fitting. More literally, it is a good thing which is beautiful. Once more, a positive note has broken through and as the chapter ends with a glimpse of the man for whom life passes swiftly, not because it is short and meaningless but because, by the grace of God, he finds it utterly absorbing. This will be the theme of the closing chapters. But first there is more to be explored of human experience and its harsh realities.”

Here Solomon breaks through with some wisdom by bringing God into the picture. He realizes it is good and proper for man to eat and drink and to find satisfaction in his work. And then he also says ‘during the few days of life God has given him – for this is his lot.’

v.19 “Moreover when God gives any man wealth and possessions and enables him to enjoy them, to accent his lot and be happy in his work – this is a gift of God.

Moreover, when God:

1. Gives any man wealth and possessions
2. And enables him to enjoy them
3. To accept his lot
4. Be happy in his work – this is a gift of God

v.20 He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.

John 10:10 “I am come, that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”

Someone has said, “It’s amazing how time flies when you are having fun.” This is the picture that is described here as a person enjoys the fruit of his labor.

In an article titled “Three Supreme Blessings” we read the following: “An enquirer once asked a student what three things he most wanted, and he said, ‘Give me books, health and quiet.’ He asked a miser and he cried, ‘Money, money, money.’ He asked a pauper

and he said faintly, 'Bread, bread, bread.' The drunkard called loudly for strong drink. He turned to the multitude around him and he heard in a confused cry, 'Wealth, fame, pleasure.' Then he asked a poor man who had long been an earnest Christian. He replied that all his wants and wishes were met in Christ. He spoke seriously and explained, 'I greatly desire three things: First, that I may be found in Christ. Secondly, that I may be like Christ. And thirdly, that I may be with Christ.'

Someone has said, "In Christ we have a love that can never be fathomed, a life that can never be dead, a righteousness that can never be tarnished, a peace that cannot be understood, a rest that can never be disturbed, a joy that can never be diminished, a hope that can never be disappointed, a glory that can never be clouded, a light that can never be darkened, a happiness that can never be interrupted, a strength that can never be enfeebled, a purity that can never be defiled, a beauty that can never be marred, a wisdom that can never be baffled, resources that can never be exhausted."

6:v. 1 I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men:

He has stated back in verse 13 of chapter 5 that he had seen a grievous evil under the sun: wealth hoarded to the harm of its owner or wealth lost through some misfortune. And now he sees another evil under the sun and it weighs heavily on men.

v. 2 God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil.

Solomon shares that God gives a man three things: wealth, possessions and honor so that he lacks nothing his heart desires. But god does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead.

Samuel Cox points out, "In the foregoing section Solomon has shown that the chief good is not to be found in that devotion to the affairs of business which was and still is characteristic of the Hebrew race. This devotion is commonly inspired either by the desire to amass great wealth for the sake of the status, influence and means of lavish enjoyment it is assumed to confer or by the more modest desire to secure a competence to stand in that golden mean of comfort which is darkened by no harassing fears of future penury or need. By a logical sequence of thought, therefore, he advances from his discussion on devotion to business to consider the leading motives by which it is inspired."

One of my good friends pointed up the fact that he was so busy acquiring wealth that he had no time to enjoy it. And this is really the case with a lot of folks who are involved in materialistic pursuits.

v. 3 A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.

v. 4 It comes with without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded.

v. 5 Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man—

v. 6 even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?

Samuel Cox points out, “But our rich man is not only like an ass, he is even more stupid, for the ass would not have his back bent even with gold ingots, if he could help it; and is only too thankful when the burden is lifted from his back. While the rich man not only will plod on beneath his heavy load but in his dread of being unladen at his journey’s end, imposes on himself a burden heavier than all his ingots and will bear that as well as his gold. He creeps along beneath his double load and brays quite pitifully if you so much as put out a hand to ease him.”

J. Sidlow Baxter points out, “In chapter 6 he points out that though a man have riches, wealth and honor he cannot enjoy it unless God permits him to do so, and moreover all the labor of man for his mouth cannot satisfy his soul. Therefore, who knoweth what is good for a man in this life. Surely the answer is to be found in an expedient course of behavior.”

If a man has a hundred children and lives many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if:

1. He cannot enjoy his prosperity
2. Does not receive proper burial, a stillborn child is better off than he.

He then describes why such is the case. And then in verse 6 he says, “Even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place.?”

Oswald Chambers points out, “Solomon was referring to the man who lays up for himself and others and he does not commend him. Today we enthrone insurance and economy but it is striking to recall that Jesus Christ commended extravagance. During his life on earth he only called one work good and that was the act of Mary of Bethany when she broke the alabaster box of ointment. It was neither useful nor her duty. It sprang from her devotion to him and he said, ‘Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.’ The life of a man is not to hoard. He has to get enough for his root life and no more. The best of his life is to be spent in confidence in God. He is meant to utilize the earth and food for the nourishment of his body but he must not live in order to make his existence. If any of the children of Israel gathered more manna than they needed, it turned into dry rot and that law still holds good.”

The man described here just because he is outstanding has more to lose than the plodder who will never arrive. He may well lose it through no fault of his own, perhaps when war or sickness or injustice spills everything into another’s lap. If he is tantalized,

so are those who have outward wealth and inward poverty, for the trouble is not simply that some possessions are less satisfying than others, as undoubtedly they are or that they are given meagerly. One could have the things men dream of which in Old Testament terms meant children by the score and years of life by the thousand and still depart unnoticed, unlamented and unfulfilled.

McGee points out, "The rich man can eat only three meals a day. He can sleep on only one bed at a time and he cannot live longer than the poor man no matter how many doctors he might have, and he takes nothing with him when he leaves. There is no picket in a shroud. Job was a rich man and he said that he had come here with nothing and he was going out the same way. It is rather empty to give one's life to the pursuit of that which does not bring happiness here and has no value hereafter. Some people spend their lives in this kind of an emptiness."

v. 7 all man's efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied

v. 8 What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?

Two questions in verse 8:

1. What advantage has a wise man over a fool?
2. What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others?

As if sensing that we may still be unconvinced since we rate the quality of a man's life higher than its comforts preach. Solomon asks the hard-headed question: "What does a poor man however well thought of actually get for his pains?" It is a fair question to reverse one of R. L. Stevenson's familiar says: "To arrive is, for most of us, better than to travel hopefully." That is the force of verse 9 and its common sense allows us no daydreams. The trouble is that to arrive is in any ultimate and satisfying sense beyond our power. Whatever we achieve will melt away as vanity and a striving after wind, whether it is the poor man's self-help or the rich man's success.

Yet we still find it easier to enlarge on the way things ought to have been than to face the truth of what they are. But this truth to be the whole truth must include what they are becoming and what will become of us. Part of this, that we shall die, we know all too well. The rest, all too little. So the chapter at this mid-point of the book ends with a string of unanswered questions. Secular man heading for death and swept along by change can only echo, Who knows what is good? Who can tell man what will be after him? It is a double bewilderment. He is left with no absolute values to live for nor not even any practical certainties to plan for.

v. 9 Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

v. 10 Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with one who is stronger than he.

v.11 The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone?

v.12 For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone?

Bishop Taylor in His Own Eloquence “What thou art before thou wert begotten? Nothing. What wert thou in the first regions of thy dwelling before thy birth? Uncleaness. What wert thou for many years after? Weakness. What in all thy life? A great sinner. What in all thy life? A great sinner. What in all thy excellencies? A mere debtor to God, to thy parents, to the earth, to all the creatures. A being thus fraught with infirmity and corruption, a very worm, in utter weakness and helplessness, can he contend with his Maker, infinitely mightier than he. Can he implead him and call him to account? Nay, but O man who art thou that repliest against God. Learn the lesson of prostrate submission. Take thy proper place, laying thy hand on thy mouth and thy mouth in the dust. To contend is to add madness to folly. To submit is thy security and thy rest.”

Cox points out, “Another reason is that it is hard, so hard as to be impossible for you to know what it is good for you to have. That on which you have set your heart may prove to be an evil rather than a good when at last you get it. The fair fruit, so pleasant and desirable to the eye, that to possess it you were content to labor and deny yourself for years may turn to an apple of Sodom in your mouth and yield you, in place of sweet pulp and juice, only the bitter ashes of disappointment.”

Leupold points out, “By beginning with the close of this verse, we shall most readily see how it fits into its connection. No man is able to discern what is coming after the situation in which he now finds himself. What the next turn of the road will bring is completely hidden from him. Why then make extensive preparations along one line like amassing riches? If a man has absolutely no knowledge as to whether that will happen to be the thing that he should really have acquired. Here are cases that may develop. He may later require patience. But he laid up a stock of gold. He may require strength of character but all he has is a strong fortune. His particular situation may call for Christian hope but his hope is built on uncertain riches. Thus, his situation is a downright calamity. To nothing more proper than to calamity may the acquisition of wealth be likened. These days of man are insubstantial enough as it is. He spends their slight number as a shadow. There is no retrieving lost days. To follow such unsubstantial pursuits as acquiring wealth makes him still more unsubstantial as a shadow.”

The answer to Solomon’s question, Who knows what is good for a man in life? Who can tell him what will happen after he is gone? Is only God himself. When we lift our hearts to him and allow him to begin to direct and to lead, we find the one who knows what is good and who can tell us what will happen.

James 4:14-17

“Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that. But as it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to the one who knows the right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

### CONCLUSIONS:

James, in speaking about our attitude toward riches in chapter 5 says, “Come now, you rich, weep and howl, for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fires. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure. Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields and which has been withheld by you cries out against you. And the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and put to death the righteous man. He does not resist you.”

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: Oppression is a way of life where money is involved.

LESSON #2: It is the love of money that creates the problem.

LESSON #3: Wealth that is hoarded does harm to its owner.

LESSON #4: You cannot take your wealth with you to the next world.

LESSON #5: Wealth and possessions and the ability to enjoy them are a gift from God.

LESSON #6: God is the one who keeps us occupied with gladness of heart.

LESSON #7: God is the one who knows what is Good for man and he also knows the days of our lives.

Proverbs 11:24 – 26 “There is one who scatters, yet increases all the more; and there is one who withholds what is justly due, but it results only in want. The generous man will be prosperous; and he who waters will himself be watered. He who withholds grain, the people will curse him; but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it.”

Zephaniah 1:18 “Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord’s wrath but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy, for he shall make a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land.”

William James say, “The great use of a life is to spend it for something that outlasts it.”

Johannesburg, South Africa – in a UPI press release the following was recorded: “Elizabeth Taylor has refused to accept the one-million-dollar pink diamond ring Richard Burton bought her and said they decided to build a hospital in Botswana with the money instead. ‘I love Richard for the extravagant thought but he doesn’t have to spoil me anymore, just love me,’ Miss Taylor said. The pink diamond ring was made up of a rare pink 25-carat stone, surrounded by 6 ½ carat blue-white diamonds, mounted on platinum. Jeweler Robert Schwartz said Wednesday when Burton bought it, it cost a million but is insured for much more.”

Charles M. Schwab was quoted as saying, “Why do I work? What do I work for?” he continued. “I have more money than I can begin to spend. I have no children, nobody to leave it to. My wife is rich enough in her own right. She does not need it. I do not need it. I work just for pleasure I find in work. The satisfaction there is in developing things, in creating; also, the associations business begets. The man who does not work for the love of work but only for money is not likely to make money nor to find much fun in life”

It was Benjamin Franklin who said, “Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it. There is nothing in its nature to produce happiness. The more a man has, the more he wants. Instead of it filling a vacuum, it makes one. If it satisfies one want, it doubles and trebles that want another way. That was true proverb of the wise man. Rely upon it. B Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.”

From the time he became a naturalized Frenchman until he died in 1661, Cardinal Mazarin was supreme in the counsels of the French court. When about to die, he dragged himself through the rooms of his gorgeous palace, pausing weakly at every step. He gazed first on one side and then on the other, letting his eyes wander over each of the magnificent objects which he had collected in a lifetime. Someone hiding behind the tapestry overheard him saying, “All these must be left behind and that too. What trouble I have had to obtain all these things. I shall never see them again. Where am I going?”