

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

## Dealing with Disappointment

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

**Introduction:** Amen. Let's take our Bibles and turn to Ecclesiastes 6:1-12. We're continuing this morning with our series "Vanity Fair" in the Book of Ecclesiastes. And it occurred to me recently that I never really told you why I named this series "Vanity Fair." Let me remedy that this morning.

You might think to yourself, "O 'Vanity Fair' is a famous magazine, and Pastor Tony was just being clever calling his series Vanity Fair after that magazine because the word 'Vanity' is so prevalent in this book." Well yes, I was trying to be clever with the use of the word "vanity." It's the Hebrew word *hevel* which I've talked about already, and it shows up four times in Ecclesiastes 6.

But "Vanity Fair" as a term goes way farther back than a magazine. It actually shows up for the first time as a city in the book *Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>1</sup> It's a place where Christian and Faithful, these two pilgrims, travel to. It's a place of utter dissolution. Lots of sin. Lots of crime. Lots of trading in the market place. In fact the name of the city in the book is "Vanity," and they have a year-long "fair" where people show up and buy goods, hence Vanity Fair. And while Christian and Faithful are in this city, they look incredibly weird to the people of the city. They wear strange garments. They talk funny. They don't buy vain things. And they don't indulge in sinful behavior like everybody else. And because of that, people get suspicious of them. And they get arrested. And they stand before the Judge of the city, Lord hate-good. And three false witness, Envy, Superstition, and Pickthank, give false testimony about them. And their false testimony is so convincing that actually one of the pilgrims is put to death in the city, Christian's beloved friend Faithful.

Now why do I tell you that story? Well one of the key refrains in the book of Ecclesiastes is "vanity, vanity, all is vanity." The author of this book is trying to tell you that life under the sun and apart from God is outright depressing. And if you put your hope in this vain, short-term existence, you will be completely disappointed. In fact this life will punish you, and leave you empty, despondent, and ultimately empty-handed, as you go to the grave just like the billions of human beings that preceded you.<sup>2</sup> And if the only hope you have is the here and now, you are to be pitied. Because soon enough the jig will be up, and you will die disappointed.

And the truth of the matter is that even Christians deal with disappointment. Even people like you and me deal with cancer and with drought and with joblessness and COVID and with economic disasters. How do you make sense of that in this Vanity Fair world? How do you enjoy life and retain hope when you're surrounded by so much hopelessness?

I mean a lot of people look out on our world and see all the problems there and say, "O don't worry, it'll get better." Well I hate to burst anyone's bubble this morning, but the truth of the matter is, "No it won't get better. It won't." This world will continue to struggle, and human beings will continue to struggle until Christ returns. That doesn't mean we shouldn't try to make our lives better; it just means that we shouldn't be naïve about the challenges we face. And how do we deal with disappointment? How do we deal with discouraging things taking place in our world? Let's talk about that honestly. And then let's find some solutions before we're done.

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<sup>1</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress: From This World to That Which Is to Come* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995), "The Sixth Stage" n.p. Accessed in Logos Bible Software.

<sup>2</sup> ATHANASIUS: "Let none of us entertain the desire for possessions, for what gain is it to acquire those things which we cannot take with us? Why not rather acquire those that we can take: prudence, justice, temperance, fortitude, understanding, charity, love of the poor, faith in Christ, gentleness, hospitality? If we obtain these, we shall find them there before us preparing a welcome for us in the land of the meek." Quoted in J. Robert Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 245-6.

**So go ahead and write this down as #1 in your notes. Here's your outline for this morning.**

**Solomon's going to give you today Three Disappointing Things in Life. Here's the first:**

**1. Wealth without Enjoyment (6:1-6)<sup>3</sup>**

What I love about **Ecclesiastes** and Solomon, its author, is that Solomon doesn't sugarcoat anything. He doesn't allow us to hold on to cheap platitudes. **Every platitude we throw at him, he shoots down like a trap shooter shoots down clay pigeons.**

Here's what he says in verse 1:<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: <sup>2</sup> 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<sup>5</sup> them, but a stranger enjoys<sup>6</sup> them.<sup>7</sup> This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.*

So here's the disappointing thing. God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor.<sup>8</sup> What else could a man ask for? But God doesn't give him the power to enjoy them. Maybe this man dies early. Maybe this man loses his wealth in a bad business venture. Maybe this man is so obsessed with the making of wealth, that he loses himself in it like Ebenezer Scrooge. And he doesn't enjoy it. He makes lots of money, but he doesn't enjoy it.<sup>9</sup>

**I heard a story once about the great 19<sup>th</sup> Century businessman John D. Rockefeller. He was like a real-life Ebenezer Scrooge. He was the world's first billionaire at the age of 53, and yet he was so obsessed about money, that he became deranged. He lived only on crackers and milk, and dealt with chronic insomnia because he was so worried about money. But then he started giving his money away and his health radically changed and he lived to the age of 98.<sup>10</sup>**

Solomon says here that he's seen an evil thing under the sun. Some people make money, and yet they don't live long enough to enjoy it. Or they work really hard, only to lose their labor to a foreign person! In fact that's exactly what happened to Solomon. He died and his son Rehoboam, through his foolishness, lost more than half of this kingdom to an upstart guy named Jeroboam. Maybe Solomon saw something like this happening as he neared death?

You might say, **"Well money isn't everything, Pastor Tony. I don't find my purpose in money. I find it in my children."** Okay, well look at verse 3.

<sup>3</sup> *If a man fathers a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many,*

By the way, this is the epitome of the ultimate blessing in Hebrew society. Lots of kids and lots of years! What else could a Hebrew in Solomon's day want?

But Solomon says,

<sup>3</sup> *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,<sup>11</sup> I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.*

Now there's a lot of hyperbole in this passage, so please don't take this literally.<sup>12</sup> Solomon is exaggerating to make a rhetorical point. That's the nature of hyperbole. You can't father a hundred children;

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<sup>3</sup> For this outline, I'm indebted to Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, "Be" Commentary Series (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 74-82.

<sup>4</sup> Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, The JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 38: "This passage describes an even worse scenario than the two related earlier. There, the toiler lived a dreary existence while hoarding his wealth, then lost it all (5:12-13), or managed to hold on to his wealth but spent a joyless life (5:14-16). Here, God lets a man have everything he wants but prevents him from enjoying it; instead, another man, who did not toil for it, gets the benefit. The irony offends Koheleth's sense of fairness."

<sup>5</sup> Literally "eat" (Hebrew: אָכַל).

<sup>6</sup> Again this is "eat" or "consume." Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 39: "Koheleth recommends the timely consumption of wealth."

<sup>7</sup> Roland Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, vol. 23A, WBC (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1992), 53: "Whereas in 2:18 Qoheleth complained about inheritance within the family, this verse envisions a harsher situation: the rich person failed to enjoy the wealth, and now a stranger takes over!"

<sup>8</sup> This is essentially the list of gifts given to Solomon according to 2 Chronicles 1:11-12. See Tremper Longman, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 169-70.

<sup>9</sup> Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 315: "Nothing is more pitiful than to be rich but unable to enjoy it; no amount of prosperity can make up for a life without joy."

<sup>10</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 121: "To die unburied was the mark of a despised and unloved end." Also Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, 75: "But his family does not love him, for when he died, he was not lamented. That's the meaning of 'he has no burial' (see Jer. 22:18-19). His relatives stayed around him only to use his money (5:11), and they wondered when the old man would die." See also Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, NICOT, 170-1. Contra Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 315.

<sup>12</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, 74: "More than one person in the Bible became so discouraged with life that he either wanted to die or wished he had never been born. This includes Moses (Num. 11:15), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4), Job (3:21; 7:15), Jeremiah (8:3; 15:10), and Jonah (4:3). Even the great apostle Paul despaired of life during a particularly tough time in his life (2 Cor. 1:8-11)."

don't even try! And the stillborn death of a child is an incredibly sad situation.<sup>13</sup> It would be very distasteful in our day to make an analogy like this, but this was perfectly acceptable in Solomon's day.<sup>14</sup> What he is saying, hyperbolically, is that child who is stillborn never has to deal with the sadness and disappointments of life that a person who lives many years does.<sup>15</sup> And you're better off dead than living miserable.<sup>16</sup>

Look at **verse 4**.

<sup>4</sup> For [the stillborn child] comes in vanity and goes in darkness, and in darkness its name is covered.

In other words, a stillborn child doesn't have to deal with the sadness of life, and nobody even knows the child's name. That's better than being rich, famous, and miserable.

<sup>5</sup> Moreover, [the stillborn child] has not seen the sun or known anything, yet it finds rest rather than he. <sup>6</sup> Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?

You know reading **Ecclesiastes** is like riding an emotional roller coaster. Sometimes he's up. Sometimes he's down. And he shifts moods really quickly. Well this is a particularly depressing part in this book. I read a commentator this last week that called this passage one of the darkest in the Bible.<sup>17</sup> I think that's right.

Solomon is saying, even if a man lives a thousand years twice over... even if a man lived longer than Methuselah and fathered a hundred children,<sup>18</sup> and makes lots and lots of money, in the end, it doesn't matter, because his destiny is the same as the stillborn child.<sup>19</sup> They both end up six-feet under. And if he lives his life miserably... if he doesn't enjoy life, then he's better off dead. That's a particularly bleak assessment of life.

**Have you ever played that board game "Life"? You guys know that game? It's a really silly game, and you never really stop and ponder these philosophical issues that Solomon puts forth. If you did in that game, people would never buy it or play it. Because what happens in that game. Everything moves forward pretty positively. You go to school. You get married. You have some kids. You make some money. And whoever retires with the most money at the end wins. Great! Play it with your kids, and teach them how to become productive members of society.**

**But there's no nuclear button in that game. There's no card that you draw that says, "Stroke... you die. The end." There should be in the game called "Life." But there's not. There's no card that says, "Miscarriage, go to grief counseling." There's no card that says, "Death of a spouse... spend the next six months of your life depressed." There's no card that says, "Child has leukemia. Spend the next five years paying thousands of dollars looking for treatment."**

**You know what's a better game that represents real life? It's more of a primitive board game. It's that game "Chutes and Ladders." It's an utterly frustrating game. It makes you furious. You go forward a few steps, and then you land on a chute and it takes you back like twenty spaces. And there's this one place on the board, where you're almost at the end, and you land on a chute, and it takes you back to the beginning. It'll really help with your sanctification if you play that game with your kids. It's an infuriating game.**

**But that's a lot like life. You have setbacks. And some of those setbacks are debilitating. And here's the truly infuriating part, at the end of life, you end up in a grave just like everybody else. Nobody wins. You know that game "Life" shouldn't end in retirement with a lot of money, it should end with a grave. The end. You die. Everyone loses.**

Look again at **verse 6**.

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<sup>13</sup> Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, NICOT, 171: "The hard-hitting imprecation of Psalm 58 climaxes with 'like a stillborn child, may they not see the sun' (v. 9 [English v. 8]). The psalmist could not think of a more horrid fate to wish upon his enemies. But, according to Qohelet, the stillborn's fate is much preferred to the life of one to whom God has given riches, long life, and many children, but not the ability to enjoy it all."

<sup>14</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, 76: "In my pastoral ministry, broken-hearted parents and grandparents have sometimes asked, 'Why did God even permit this child to be conceived if it wasn't going to live?' Solomon asked, 'Why did God permit this man to have wealth and a big family if the man couldn't enjoy it?'"

<sup>15</sup> Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, TOTC, 121: "Better to miscarry at birth than to miscarry throughout life."

<sup>16</sup> Iain Provan, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 129: "Certain passages of the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Sam. 31:11–13; 1 Kings 14:10–11; Isa. 14:19–20; Jer. 16:4–5) illustrate the importance of burial to the ancient Semitic peoples, as the community of the living sent the deceased person to be at rest with the community of the dead. A good life came to an end in a good death."

<sup>17</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2010), 140.

<sup>18</sup> Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 315: "To have a hundred children (v. 3) or live two thousand years (v. 6) are oriental exaggerations; the three traditional conditions for happiness were wealth, long life, and many children." Also Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, TOTC, 122: "A thousand years twice over is ironic exaggeration: Methuselah's life twice over cannot satisfy if the outlook is awry."

<sup>19</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, 75: "Verses 3–6 surely deal with a hypothetical case, because nobody lives for two thousand years, and no monogamous marriage is likely to produce a hundred children. (Solomon's son Rehoboam had eighty-eight children, but he had eighteen wives and sixty concubines—like father, like son. See 2 Chronicles 11:21.) The Preacher was obviously exaggerating here in order to make his point: no matter how much you possess, if you don't possess the power to enjoy it, you might just as well never have been born."

<sup>6</sup> Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?

What's that one place? What's he talking about? He's talking about a grave... ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Right? **You ever gone to a cemetery and seen one of those tombstones with a witty statement?**

***"Remember friend as you walk by  
As you are now so once was I  
As I am now you will surely be  
Prepare thyself to follow me."***

Now part of what Solomon is saying here is that we should enjoy our wealth and resources while we can, because it's fleeting. We talked last week about fearing God and enjoying life. That's part of Solomon's argument here. Enjoy life while you can. But another part of his argument is that wealth in this life and even the joy that comes with it is *hevel*. It's like smoke. It's like fog. It dissipates in front of you. And the grave doesn't discriminate between rich and poor or happy and sad. All go to one place.<sup>20</sup>

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**So one disappointment in life is wealth without enjoyment. Here's another disappointing thing. Write this down as #2.**

2. **Work** without **satisfaction** (6:7-9)

Solomon says in verse 7,

<sup>7</sup> *All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.*

You work and you work and you work. And it's never quite enough. There's an insatiable desire for more. Our appetites are never completely satisfied.

**You know when I was a kid... true story... my favorite thing in the world to eat was peanut butter and syrup sandwiches. I'm not even joking. I could eat that six days a week and twice on Sunday. And for breakfast, all I ever wanted was Fruit Loops or Frosted Flakes. And then I went to college and all I ever ate was Ramen Noodles.**

**But then you get out of school and make a little money, and start to enjoy the finer things in life, right? And now I can't even look at Fruit Loops in the cereal aisle. That's too primitive. My palate has grown too sophisticated for that. Give me Honey Bunches of Oats. I can't eat sirloins anymore. Give me the fillet mignon.**

**You know I used to love Hershey's Chocolate bars and Crunch bars. But now I can't eat them. It's my wife's fault. It's got to be European chocolate or nothing. My palate is too sophisticated now for cheap, American chocolate.**<sup>21</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied.*

**We're not satisfied anymore with one car or two cars.<sup>22</sup> We're not satisfied anymore with our square footage. We're not satisfied anymore with the clothes that we wear or the vacations we take. We need more. We need better. Be careful now, Harvest Decatur. That's a trap.**<sup>23</sup> Chasing your appetites for satisfaction doesn't deliver what you think it delivers. And besides that, there's this little old thing that we like to call the tenth commandment. Right? Thou shalt not covet (cf. **Ex 20:17**). The Apostle Paul says in the NT, "For I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need" (**Phil 4:11-12**). **Have you learned that lesson, Harvest Decatur?**

Paul says elsewhere, "Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content" (**1 Tim 6:6-8**). **Here let me give you some advice, Harvest Decatur. Life is filled with disappointment. It is. The sooner you learn that and accept that, the better off you'll be. Listen, don't let your disappointment lead to discontentment. Don't do that. Don't let disappointment and covetousness lead you to a discontented life. That's the road to misery, no matter how much money you have, because our appetites are never satisfied.**

<sup>20</sup> Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, TOTC, 122: "The *one place* is 'Sheol', the realm of the dead."

<sup>21</sup> JEROME: "Even when a bite to eat delights the palate, it seems to give pleasure only for as long as it remains in the mouth, for when it passes into the belly, it can no longer be distinguished from other food." Quoted in Wright, ed., *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, ACCS, 246.

<sup>22</sup> Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 40: "This verse [verse 7] refers to the craving for possessions of all sorts, not food alone."

<sup>23</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, 77: "Why does a person eat? So that he can add years to his life. But what good is it for me to add years to my life *if I don't add life to my years?*"



Phil Ryken says, “Before we buy something or eat something or turn something on, it is better for us to talk things over with our Father in Heaven, saying something like, ‘Lord, you know how empty I feel right now. Help me not to run away from my problems but to turn them over to you. Teach me that you are enough for me. And by your grace, give me the peace and the joy that you have for me in Jesus.’”<sup>24</sup>

Let’s keep going. Solomon says in verse 8:

<sup>8</sup> For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living?

In other words, a fool who knows how to enjoy life is better than a wise man who doesn’t.<sup>25</sup> And a poor man who is happy with what he has is better off than a rich man who is perpetually discontent. How’s that for turning the tables on the book of **Proverbs**? Because in **Proverbs**, the wise man always trumps the fool. And the rich man is more industrious than the poor. But now, the old man Solomon disagrees with his younger self, and says rich or poor, wise or foolish, is irrelevant, if you can’t enjoy what you’ve been given. You’re better off being poor and being satisfied with what you have than being rich and unsatisfied.<sup>26</sup> You’re better off being a fool and being content, than being wise and discontent.<sup>27</sup>

Look at verse 9.

<sup>9</sup> Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

**This is the ancient equivalent to “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.”**<sup>28</sup> Ever heard that before? “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite.” In other words, learn to be content with what you’ve been given. Don’t let discontentment seep into your soul.<sup>29</sup>

**Do you remember that Aesop’s Fable about the dog with the bone who sees his reflection in the river?**<sup>30</sup> The dog, if you remember, gets a nice juicy bone from the local butcher. And he’s happier than a pig in slop. Nobody could be happier than this dog. But then he sees his reflection in the river. And since he’s a dog, he naturally thinks that this reflection is another dog with another bone, a bone that’s even juicier and better than his own! So he drops his bone in the river, so that he can go after the bone of that other dog. And the tragedy of the story is that he loses the one good thing that he has, because he was chasing something else that he didn’t have. That’s the moral of verse nine.

<sup>9</sup> Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind.

**When I was a teenager there was that famous song on the radio by TLC called “Waterfalls.” “Don’t go chasing Waterfalls // Please stick to the rivers and the lakes that you’re used to.” That’s what this passage is about. Don’t let discontentment get the better of you. Don’t go chasing the wind. Be content, and enjoy what God has given you.**

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**And here’s a final disappointing thing in life. Write this down as #3. There’s wealth without enjoyment. Work without satisfaction, and this might be the most disappointing of all three.**

**3) Questions without answers (6:10-12)**

Solomon says in verse 10:<sup>31</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Whatever has come to be has already been named,<sup>32</sup> and it is known what man is,

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<sup>24</sup> Ryken, *Ecclesiastes*, 144.

<sup>25</sup> Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 316: “The point is not only that the wise do not necessarily get wealthy but that they no less than others are bound to the drives of the appetite.” Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 41: “Since the thirst for wealth is unquenchable, an ingenious man is no better off than an incompetent one.”

<sup>26</sup> Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 316: “Verse 8 anticipates that the reader, by now convinced that the pursuit of wealth is folly, might conclude that a life devoted to the quest for knowledge is the better way. The Teacher argues that in fact the learned really have no significant advantage over the unlettered, and that sound judgment and social skills do not do a poor man all that much good.”

<sup>27</sup> Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 41: “A wise (that is, ingenious) man who fails to enjoy wealth has no advantage over the fool.”

<sup>28</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, 78: “Verse 9 is Solomon’s version of the familiar saying, ‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.’ This proverb has been around for a long time. The Greek biographer Plutarch (46–120) wrote, ‘He is a fool who lets slip a bird in the hand for a bird in the bush.’ Solomon is saying, ‘It’s better to have little and really enjoy it than to dream about much and never attain it.’ Dreams have a way of becoming nightmares if we don’t come to grips with reality.”

<sup>29</sup> Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, 41: “If we are enjoying a good meal with friends, this is a ‘sight of the eyes,’ and it is good. But if we start to think of other things we crave—a better cuisine, perhaps, or prestige, or success, or sex—we lose contact with the actual place and moment, and our soul departs, as it were, and wanders off to another, nonexistent place. Then the moment is depleted of meaning, and we have nothing.”

<sup>30</sup> Luther used this analogy. See Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, NICOT, 175. For a modern rendition of Aesop’s Fable, see Milo Winter’s “Aesop for Children”:

<https://www.heritage-history.com/index.php?c=read&author=winter&book=aesop&story=dogreflection>

<sup>31</sup> Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, WBC, 57: “The Masoretes [BHS] recognized 6:10 as the beginning of the second half of the book.”

<sup>32</sup> The syntax of this verse is awkward, but the message is essentially the same as other passages in Ecclesiastes that affirm God’s ultimate sovereignty (cf. 1:9-10; 3:15). For more on God’s sovereignty in the Bible, see John Piper’s article, “Plunge Your Mind into the Ocean of God’s Sovereignty,” 12-01-15:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/plunge-your-mind-into-the-ocean-of-gods-sovereignty>

In Hebrew thought, to name something is to control it. You show ownership over it. That's why God told Adam to name the animals.<sup>33</sup> He was giving Adam dominion over the animals. And in this verse, Solomon is saying that history has already been named. Mankind has already been named. God has control over everything. **For some people that's discouraging, but for Christians, that's a comfort. It's an aspect of God's sovereignty and his omnipotence. I'm glad God has everything under control!**

<sup>10</sup> *Whatever has come to be has already been named [by God], and it is known<sup>34</sup> [by God] what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he.*

That final pronoun is a reference to God. This is Solomon's way of saying, **"God is sovereign; deal with it!" Don't get angry with God or try to change the equation. He's bigger than you. He's stronger than you. And he knows more than you. So just trust him!**

Remember when Job tried to go toe to toe with God?<sup>35</sup> Remember when Job demanded that God explain himself to him? He demanded that God give an explanation for what happened! What did God say? How did God answer Job? God answered Job by basically saying, **"Job, you don't even know the right questions to ask, buddy. You're not even big enough to know what you don't know."**

And then God went on this rant for like four chapters (**Job 38-41**) talking about how little Job knows. God says, **"Where were you, Job, when I laid the foundations of the earth? Where were you when I created light and darkness, land and sea, stars and galaxies? You don't even know where I store up the snow, Job. You don't even know where the mountain goats give birth? You don't even understand how to make the great creatures of the land or sea, so how can you question me about these other things?"**

And the remarkable thing about the book of **Job** is that God never tells Job what happened at the beginning. God never tells Job that he and Satan had a little wager concerning him. And he never explains why he suffered so greatly. And that's okay by **Job** at the end of the book. He's going to leave that to the LORD. Job understands that, "he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he." And to some people that might be discouraging.

But actually that's really encouraging. I'm glad that we have someone who is infinitely stronger than us that we can look up to and trust. The great, Russian novelist and Christian, **Fyodor Dostoyevsky**, said once, **"The one essential condition of human existence is that man should always be able to bow down before something infinitely great. If men are deprived of the infinitely great they will not go on living and die of despair. The Infinite and the Eternal are as essential for man as the little planet on which he dwells."**<sup>36</sup>

Solomon says in **verse 11**.

<sup>11</sup> *The more words, the more vanity, and what is the advantage to man?* <sup>12</sup> *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?*

In other words, life is full of unanswered questions. For every answer you get to one of the deep questions of life, it opens up another ten lines of questioning. And who knows what will happen after we're gone?<sup>37</sup>

**"That's depressing, Pastor Tony."** Yeah it is depressing. Solomon's depressed thinking about it. If all we have is life under the sun, then all you have to hope for is a few thrills in these few short years, and then a funeral, and you get put into the ground. All you get is a few days of this vain life, and then you pass like a shadow. Here today; gone tomorrow. Someday we'll have a funeral for you, and then we'll all go back to the church to eat potato salad.

**I heard a story this last week about the great Alabama football coach, Bear Bryant. I heard about someone who actually got saved after he went to Bryant's funeral. Because he went to his funeral, and it was an event unlike anything he'd ever seen before. There were thousands of people gathered for this funeral. And even on the way to the graveyard, there were people lined up on the highway with signs that said, "We love you, Bear Bryant." And this guy thought, "Wow, what a great guy! Bear Bryant." But**

<sup>33</sup> Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 317n147: "נִקְרָא שְׁמוֹ (Eccl 6:10) clearly recalls Gen 2:19: מִהֲיִקְרָא לוֹ ... שְׁמוֹ."

<sup>34</sup> Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 317-318: "The participle 'known' alludes to the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the place at which Adam discovered that he could not contend with God and win."

<sup>35</sup> Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, WBC, 58: "Many commentators see a possible reference to Job's stormy contention with the Almighty. This may also be suggested by the reference to wordiness in v 11." Also Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, TOTC, 123: "Man cannot escape his limitations, nor can he completely unravel the world's anomalies (cf. 1:15). He may, like Job, wish to debate the matter with God, but God is altogether greater."

<sup>36</sup> From Dostoevsky's novel *Possessed*. Quoted in Philip Yancey's *Rumors of Another World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC, 318: "Adam's days, though they numbered 930 years (Gen 5:5), passed like a shadow, and no one could tell him what was to follow him. What is true of him is equally true of all who bear his name, 'ādām/humanity. We are but weak mortals before an omnipotent God."

then later, when he went by that same highway, all the people had left. They went back to work. They went back to running errands. And this guy thought to himself, “Boy if people forget Bear Bryant that easily and then go right back to their lives, what are they going to do for me? I’m a nobody! There may be a hundred people at my funeral, and that’s it.” And it was that realization that life is short, and you are easily forgotten, that led this man to Christ. He wanted more in this life than just a funeral.”<sup>38</sup>

Let me ask you, church, what are you living for? What are you hoping in, Harvest Decatur? I’ll tell you what, if it’s wealth or if it’s work or if it’s family or if it’s a legacy, or if it’s a good funeral, it’s going to be short-lived. I hope you got more than that on the horizon, cause that’s not going to last very long. And by the way, you better figure this out quick. Because life is short, and we’re not promised another day.

You know about ten years ago, I preached a message on this topic from 1 Timothy 4. In fact, I looked it up yesterday, and it was almost exactly ten years ago that I preached it. November 19, 2011. It was a sermon about young men, older men, young women, and older women. And I spoke to each of those categories in our church. And I said in that message that some of you are in the first quarter of life. And some of you are in the second quarter. Some of you are in the third quarter. Some of you are in the fourth quarter of life. And some of you are in overtime. I got a lot of laughs for that comment.

But that was ten years ago. And let me just state the obvious for you. Some of you who were in the first quarter of life when I preached that sermon ten years ago have moved to the second quarter. Some of you have moved from the second quarter to the third quarter. That includes me. I was 33 when I preached that message. I was just a baby. Some of you have moved from the third quarter to fourth quarter. And some of you are either right on the cusp or already in overtime. I can think of two people in particular who heard that sermon ten years ago who have passed away since then. There’s probably more than two, but I know for a fact there at least two.

And honestly it doesn’t really matter whether you are in the first, second, third, or fourth quarter of life, you aren’t promised another day. And if you are living your life trying to blindly chase money, work, meaning, and contentment apart from God, you are going to die an empty death and be forgotten forever. “Can we enjoy life, Pastor Tony?” “Can we!” Yes, we can. Solomon says as much in Ecclesiastes. But you can’t enjoy your way out of death. It’s coming for you.

“What do we do about that, Tony?” What are we going to do about the imminence of our death?” Well, you know, don’t you? You know the answer to that question. If I’ve been my job for the last ten years, then you know the answer to that question. How do we escape the disappointments of this life? How do we escape the certainty and finality of our impending death?

One answer: JESUS! You ever heard that song before? “In the morning, when I rise. In the morning when I rise. In the morning when I rise. Give me Jesus.” “And when I go to die. Yes, and when I go to die. And when I go to die. Give me Jesus.” “If there is no Heaven, then there is no way to escape the vanity of our existence. Nothing matters. Our longings will never be satisfied. Our appetites will keep wandering forever. As a result, sometimes we will be tempted to think that we would be better off dead, and no amount of complaining or arguing will change any of it. But if this life is a short preparation for a long eternity, then everything matters and there will be joy for us at the right hand of God.”<sup>39</sup>

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Let me close with this. Let me go back to *Pilgrim’s Progress* for a second. There’s a great moment at the end of that scene when Christian and Faithful were on trial in the town of Vanity. They were actually given a chance to defend themselves. So Faithful stands up to defend himself. And then the jury gather to determine his fate. And here’s the list of jurors; here’s what John Bunyan wrote. “Then went the jury out, whose names were Mr. Blindman, Mr. No-good, Mr. Malice, Mr. Love-lust, Mr. Live-loose, Mr. Heady, Mr. High-mind, Mr. Enmity, Mr. Liar, Mr. Cruelty, Mr. Hate-light, and Mr. Implacable.”<sup>40</sup> These are the jurors that are going to decide Faithful’s fate. And with names like that, I’m sure you can guess what verdict they will render.

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<sup>38</sup> Told by Tommy Nelson in his sermon “Correcting Your Perspective on Life and Pain,” 01-17-18: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WW4LR72zxM>

<sup>39</sup> Ryken, *Ecclesiastes*, 146.

<sup>40</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, “The Sixth Stage” n.p.

Well they decide to execute Faithful. And that's what they do. They kill him. And for whatever reason they set Christian free to continue his journey to the Celestial City. But after they kill Faithful, they see this multitude of chariots and horses ready to take him to the Celestial City. He gets fast-tracked to the city, while Christian continues his journey. And as Christian leaves Vanity Fair, he's sings this song. And it goes like this:

*“Well, Faithful, thou hast faithfully profest  
Unto thy Lord, with whom thou shalt be blest,  
When faithless ones, with all their vain delights,  
Are crying out under their hellish plights:  
Sing, Faithful, sing, and let thy name survive;  
For though they killed thee, thou art yet alive.”<sup>41</sup>*

**Listen up, Harvest Decatur. Life is hard. Life is full of disappointment. Life is short. Life is full of vanity and hardships and cruelty and injustice. Yes, there are pleasures and joy in this life, but there aren't nearly enough of them, and they don't last.<sup>42</sup> And you will die, probably sooner than you want. But for those who die in Christ, you will live forever in eternity with him. You will put vanity and chasing the wind in your rear-view mirror and you will never experience it again. Put your hope in that. Put your faith in Christ. And he will turn even the most profound disappointments in this life into unending joy in his presence for eternity.**

**Pray with me and then we can sing together!**

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, NICOT, 169: “A survey of all the passages in which Qohelet speaks of *pleasure* reveals that, while Qohelet commends it during life for those who are able to find it, he knows that it has no ultimate meaning, no profit (*yitrôn*), and so it is ultimately meaningless (*hebel*). Pleasure is all there is during one's earthly existence, advises Qohelet, so enjoy it now, if you can.”