

## **Why Man Is Unable to Find Joy in the World**

Ecclesiastes 6:7-12; Philippians 3:19

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If your car came to a complete stop and if you were unable to get it started, you would no doubt want your mechanic to closely look it over and tell you what the problem is. If he came back to you and told you, “A simple tune-up is not going to get it running again. You are going to need a new engine.” No doubt, after picking yourself up from the floor, you would want to know WHY—WHY the present engine is unable to run as it once did. What makes it dysfunctional for driving? That would be important information for you to have, if your car needs a new engine. Would it not?

And if such information would be important for you to have as it relates to a car, how much more important it would be to have such information as it relates to your soul. For as you consider mankind, you see that the human race as a whole has become dysfunctional. Each of us is unable to find an enduring joy in the world around us. Oh we go to school, we work, we marry, we have children, we buy a house, and we eat, drink, play, sleep, and breathe. But dear ones, something is definitely broken, and a mere tune-up will not fix the problem. For by nature we are all not just dysfunctional, we are spiritually dead and physically dying. We cannot fix ourselves any more than a dead man can fix himself. We need new life. We need everlasting life. We need the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, if we are to know that peace that passes all understanding, that contentment in times of severest trial or greatest blessing, and that joy of the Lord that is our strength. The resurrection life of Christ is the answer to your deadness, but God also wants you to know WHY you are unable to find a lasting joy in that which is created (whether it is riches, pleasures, honors, labors, accomplishments, or people). What has gone wrong with mankind, that none of us is able to find a lasting happiness in this world? For to know the problem is to look not to the problem for the solution, but to look to Christ alone to correct the problem in each of us.

This Lord’s Day let us consider why man is unable to find joy in the world around him. There are three separate responses given by Solomon: (1) Man Is Restless (Ecclesiastes 6:7-9); (2) Man Is Dust (Ecclesiastes 6:10); and (3) Man Is a Shadow (Ecclesiastes 6:11-12).

### **I. Man Is Restless (Ecclesiastes 6:7-9).**

A. Solomon, the Preacher, brings to a close the first major section of his sermon wherein he demonstrates the absolutely vanity, futility, and despair that will be found by all who seek a lasting joy and an enduring happiness in anything of this world (Ecclesiastes 1-6). The connection between the immediately preceding section (Ecclesiastes 6:1-6) and this section (Ecclesiastes 6:7-12) is the riches, honors, or blessings of this world that were mentioned in the previous section. More specifically in the previous section we learned, HOW we are to enjoy the riches and blessings of this world; and in the present section, WHY man is unable to enjoy the riches and blessings of this world. For there are inherent problems with man that make him unable in his natural state to find an enduring joy by means of the possessions and blessings found in this world. The first reason why man is unable to enjoy the blessings of this world is that Man Is Restless.

B. In Ecclesiastes 6:7-9 the theme of man’s restlessness is found particularly in the following two statements by Solomon.

1. “All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled” (Ecclesiastes 6:7). Solomon says that all the work that man performs in this world is to meet the needs and comforts of his MOUTH. Now obviously that doesn’t mean in a literal sense that a man eats everything he obtains by his labor

(whether money, house, or car). Solomon is simply using food (which is eaten with the mouth) as one of the necessities of life (as well as one of the greatest comforts and pleasures of life) to represent all that God has given to man by way of outward blessing in this world.

a. In the Lord's Prayer, we are taught by Christ to pray: "Give us this day our daily BREAD" (Matthew 6:11). The Lord did not intend for us to pray only for bread each day, but rather for all the outward blessings of this life which may contribute to our enjoying Him all the more. For that which we eat with our mouths is one great blessing God gives to man in this world, and so represents all other blessings that man receives from God in this world. Likewise, when Paul speaks of some who have deserted the apostolic faith and practice which he delivered to them and have gone to pursue the outward riches, honors, pleasures, and comforts of this world, he says concerning these, "whose God is their BELLY" (Philippians 3:19). That phrase doesn't mean that they were gluttons necessarily and that their real problem was food. It simply means that they have left Christ as their first love and have rather pursued the outward honors, pleasures, and comforts of this world as their first love. Paul himself defines what he means by "belly" when he explains in the same verse, "who mind earthly things." Solomon uses the "mouth" in a similar way here in Ecclesiastes 6:7 to represent all of the outward possessions, honors, pleasures, and comforts of this world, which man receives through his work and accomplishments.

b. In the next part of the sentence we find the restlessness of man exposed: "and yet the appetite is not filled." Although man eats and eats and eats of the things of this world, he is never filled or satisfied. Solomon is not simply pointing out the sin of covetousness in man—the more man has the more he wants (as in Ecclesiastes 5:10). For when we consider that what Solomon actually said is not filled in Ecclesiastes 6:7 is not the "appetite" but the "soul", we are led to a deeper problem in man that must be fixed. What Solomon says here is that the SOUL is not satisfied. Man seeks to satisfy the inward needs that he has in his soul with the outward possessions, honors, pleasures, and comforts of this world. But as we see, the soul of man is not satisfied and cannot be truly satisfied with the things of this world. It would be like trying to satisfy the thirst of man with bread or satisfy the hunger of man with air. To a far greater degree, the soul of man cannot be satisfied with the work and accomplishments of man in this life. No matter how hard you try, you will not find an enduring joy in your house, in your family, in your academic degrees, in your job, in your sports, in your hobbies, or in any other blessing God gives to you in this world. Why? Because although your eye, ear, mouth, or belly might find some short-lived pleasure in the outward blessings of this world, your soul (the core and center of your very being) must be filled with the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be satisfied. You must trust Christ, love Christ, and obey Christ, if your soul is to be satisfied in this world. You may have everything else in this world that you desire, but if you do not have the Lord Jesus Christ, you will continue your search for a lasting joy, peace, and contentment. You will be just like the Israelites of old, who lusted for more than just the manna God gave to them while in the wilderness. So the Lord sent them quail to eat in addition to the manna. But as they ate with their mouths and filled their bellies in abundance, the Psalmist declares that God "sent leanness into their soul" (Psalm 106:15). Their mouth was satisfied and their belly was full, but their soul was empty and restless. Now because their souls were still empty and restless, the Psalmist says in the following verse that the Israelites then envied the honor given to Moses and Aaron (Psalm 106:16). Not being satisfied with food, they restlessly pursued honor. Likewise dear ones, your souls will be ever restless looking for something in this world to bring satisfaction, if you believe that something in this world can actually make the soul happy. The Lord God will send leanness into your soul to remind you that the blessings of this world cannot satisfy the soul of man.

2. There is a second reference to the restlessness of man in Ecclesiastes 6:9: "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire."

a. Solomon had just asked in the previous verse (Ecclesiastes 6:8) a couple questions to demonstrate that all men are in the same boat when it comes to the soul's dissatisfaction with

the things of this life: “For what hath the wise more than the fool? What hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the living?” In other words, Solomon asks, “What advantage do those who are considered wise in the world have over those who are considered fools, when it comes to finding joy in the pleasures and comforts of this world? Of course, Solomon would say the wise of the world have no advantage over the poor. For the problem is not academic or practical. The problem is not a lack of intelligence or education. The problem is not a lack of common sense. The problem is that neither those who are considered wise in the world nor those who are considered fools in the world know how to satisfy the soul of man. Solomon then asks (in effect), “Or what advantage do those who are in poverty have in overcoming great social obstacles to become successful in the eyes of those who live in the world?” Many who were born into very poor circumstances have left the ghetto, have worked hard, have gotten an education, and have attained many accomplishments in the eyes of the world. But even these will find that the soul is not satisfied with all of their achievements in this life. The point is simply this: no earthly advantages that one man has over another will make his soul truly happy.

b. So what is the problem? Solomon again exposes the same problem in Ecclesiastes 6:9 that he had exposed in Ecclesiastes 6:7: Man is restless. For Solomon says in effect, “It is better to be content with what you presently have (“the sight of the eyes”) than to be driven by “the wandering of the desire” (quite literally, “the walking or journeying of the soul”). So the contrast here is between staying where you are and learning to be content with what you have, versus taking off on another journey because your soul has not found joy in all of the possessions and accomplishments you presently have. Dear ones, it is not because you do not have enough of whatever you think will make you happy in this world that is the problem. The very problem is that nothing in this world is able to satisfy the soul of man, and so man is ever on a journey to try this or to try that. This is a constant vanity and vexation to the spirit of man—a continual struggle and an endless aggravation.

C. The only food for the soul that will make you happy is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the BREAD that has come down from heaven to give life, joy, and peace to your soul. Only when your soul is satisfied with Christ will you be able to truly enjoy the money, home, car, food, drink, job, family, and even the ordinances of the church. That is the way (and the only way) that the Lord has established for man to find joy while in this world. THE MOUTH OF THE BODY may eat and drink of every blessing in this world, but man will only find restlessness. However, THE MOUTH OF THE SOUL may eat and drink of Jesus Christ, and man will find a rest that satisfies now and for all eternity. Augustine summarized the problem very well when he prayed to this effect, “Man is restless until he finds his rest in Thee.” Christ is the “Desire of all nations” whether the nations realize it or not (Haggai 2:7). He is what the soul of every man needs to be satisfied. He is our righteousness, because we are wicked and ungodly. He is our life, because we are dead. He is our wisdom, because we are foolish. He is our joy, because we are miserable. He is our light, because we are blind. He is our strength, because we are helpless. He is our salvation, because we deserve hell. Dear ones, don’t be misled to think that you will find joy if only you gain this or accomplish that in this world. Paul found that everything he thought was gain in the world was a loss in comparison to gaining Christ (Philippians 3:7-10). When this is how we view the Lord Jesus, we will know the joy that satisfies the soul and the rest that will quell the restlessness of man.

## **II. Man Is Dust (Ecclesiastes 6:10).**

A. The second reason why man is unable to enjoy the blessings of this world is that Man Is Dust. Solomon in reviewing all that he has said about the vanity and emptiness of the things in this world says in Ecclesiastes 6: 10, “That which hath been is named.” In other words, he has named or identified the many different vanities that have existed in the world (whether they be riches, honor, pleasure, food, clothing, servants, music, family, long life, palaces, gardens, worldly knowledge and wisdom, and personal accomplishments). But there is one vanity that encompasses all the vanities that have already been named,

and it is known as MANKIND (“and it is known that it is man” Ecclesiastes 6:10). Dear ones, it is not simply that the things in this world are vanity. It is that YOU and I are vanity. YOU and I are empty. For YOU and I are man (Psalm 39:4-5). It is not simply that all things in this world are vain in making you happy. YOU are vain and unable to make yourself happy. YOU are the chief vanity. For being rational creatures made in the image of God with an eternal soul, YOU have sought for happiness in everything but the Lord Jesus Christ.

B. The very word that is used for “man” in the Hebrew language means, the ground or dirt beneath your feet. In the Hebrew language, *adam* (man or Adam) was formed from the Hebrew word, *adamah* (which means “ground, land”). You are like a grain of sand before the infinite and everlasting God. You are powerless to order the circumstances in your life in order to promote your own happiness. You try to do so, but you constantly fail. Why? Because you are dust and not God! Every day you see that this world, the people in it, and the circumstances in it, are beyond your control. Thus, if happiness depends upon you controlling what happens in this world, you will never find it.

C. You think that if you could only arrange your life the way that you want it, you would find happiness in this world. Thus, the path to happiness is to look upon yourself as the one who determines and plans your own life. You call the shots. You are the lord and master of your own life. The only problem is that God through Solomon says to us all, “You are from dust and to dust shall you return.” Though rational creatures are endowed by God with the ability to make moral decisions, the world (and all that occurs in it) is not ordered by man. It is ordered by Almighty God (Psalm 33:10-11). Solomon says, “neither may he [man] contend with him [God] that is mightier than he” (Ecclesiastes 6:10). Perhaps one of the greatest sources of frustration in your life is how things don’t work out the way that you planned. By your frustration, by your anger over such unfulfilled plans, by your impatience in waiting for things to work out, you (who are but dust) contend with the almighty wise God acting as though you were wiser than He. But dear ones, He has the right to do with His what He wills to do (Romans 9:20). He is most wise and cannot make any mistakes. He will glorify Himself, and He will always do what is good for His people. He will withhold no good thing from those who walk uprightly, even when His people are persecuted. Dear ones, you cannot enjoy the blessings of this life until you humbly bow before the Lord and acknowledge and practice the fact that you are dust and He is God. There will be no joy in the Lord while you contend with the Lord over what He brings into your life by way of His most wise and good providence.

### **III. Man Is a Shadow (Ecclesiastes 6:11-12).**

A. Now we come to the conclusion of this section. Seeing that vanity and emptiness fills everything in this world, what advantage is it for you to focus all your attention on gaining more and more of that which will not make you happy? That is the sense of Ecclesiastes 6:11. If you believe that anything in this life can MAKE you happy, you will only find misery and vanity in it. For, dear ones, you are restless until you find your rest in God, and you are powerless to control all the circumstances in life to make you happy.

B. Here we find the final problem man has in seeking joy in this world. “For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?” Certainly man does not know what is good for him. Otherwise, he would find in this world what it is that can make him happy. Only God knows and reveals to you (by His Word) what is good for you. As sinners, you always think you have a better idea or a better way to find happiness. In this question is found one more reason why man is unable to find the joy for which he seeks in this world: Man Is a Shadow. He is here today and gone tomorrow. All that he is and all that he has in this world are as substantial as a shadow on the wall. Try to grab a shadow in your hand—you can’t catch and hold it. Just as a shadow cannot enjoy anything in this world, so man who is a

shadow cannot enjoy anything in this life without Christ, who is the body and who is the life that gives meaning and purpose to life (Colossians 2:7). A shadow existence is all that you have, dear ones, apart from faith in Christ, love for Christ, and obedience to Christ. And as a shadow that quickly vanishes away, so will you (Psalm 144:4). If this world is your life and your joy, you cannot possibly find joy here knowing that you will leave it all behind. The only way to have joy in this life is to find your chief joy in Christ. Make Him your reason and purpose for living. "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

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