



Overview

Author: King Solomon

Date: c 931 BC (end of Solomon's reign)

Purpose: to reveal the vaporous nature of life without God; to instruct us to use what we have been given in thanksgiving to God; to encourage enjoyment of and contentment with present blessings.

Outline:

I. 1-2 Solomon's Quest for Wisdom

II. 3:1-12:8 Pearls of Wisdom

- A. 5:10-17: The Vanity of Wealth
- B. 5:18-20: Contentment
- C. 6:1-12: The Vanity of Wealth, continued

III. 12:9-14 Postscript

(Adapted from James Bollhagen. *Ecclesiastes*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: CPH, 2011)

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Around the Word Bible Study

Trinity, 2015

Contentment Ecclesiastes 5:10-6:12

Opening: Psalm 103:1-13

¹Bless the LORD, | O my soul,*
and all that is within me,
bless his | holy name!

²**Bless the LORD, | O my soul,*
and forget not all his | benefits,**

³who forgives all your in- | iquity,*
who heals all your dis- | eases,

⁴**who redeems your life | from the pit,*
who crowns you with steadfast love and |
mercy,**

⁵who satisfies | you with good*
so that your youth is renewed like the | eagle's.

⁶**The LORD works | righteousness*
and justice for all who | are oppressed.**

⁷He made known his ways to | Moses,*
his acts to the people of | Israel.

⁸**The LORD is merciful and | gracious,*
slow to anger and abounding in | steadfast love.**

⁹He will not | always hide,*
nor will he keep his anger for- | ever.

¹⁰**He does not deal with us according | to our sins,*
nor repay us according to our in- | iquities.**

¹¹For as high as the heavens are a- | bove the earth,*
so great is his steadfast love toward those who |
fear him;

¹²**as far as the east is | from the west,*
so far does he remove our transgres- | sions
from us.**

¹³As a father shows compassion to his | children,*
so the LORD shows compassion to those who | fear
him.

**Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.**

Read Ecclesiastes 5:10-6:12

5:10-11: The Vanity of Wealth

Luther summarizes the vanity of wealth as follows: "To gather riches, therefore, is to gather many who eat them. Why, then, do you torment yourself this way to scrape things together? Be content with what you have. Even if you accumulate riches, they will not come without brining along as guests those who will eat them, if not during your life, then certainly after your death. Beyond this you will have nothing from all your goods except something to fill your mouth and stomach and to clothe your body," (AE 15:87).

5:12: Wealth & Anxiety

What keeps the wealthy from rest and satisfaction?

See Proverbs 27:20; compare also Ecclesiastes 2:23 and 4:8. What makes someone rich? See Proverbs 10:22.

Luther: "Whatever evil does not befall you, regard as a gain. For that is how it is in this life, that we should expect evil things daily, but good things are beyond expectation, and that is how they come. But when they do come, we should give thanks to God for a special act of kindness... but when the opposite happens, do not fret," (AE 15:89).

Why should we, as Luther says, expect evil things daily? See Psalm 51:4. How does a constant awareness of our sin aid us in heeding Luther's advice? See Psalm 103:10. What comfort do we have when evil things happen? See Matthew 10:29-31 and Romans 8:28.

5:13-14: The Only Thing That Hurts More Than Wealth Is Losing It

What does Ezekiel 16:49 teach about the temptation the wealthy face and God's expectations for them? What reminder does Solomon give to encourage us to use what we've been given in service to those around us now? See Ecclesiastes 2:21.

See Exodus 16:1-20. What happened to Israel when they gathered more than they needed? What lesson can we learn from this? What solution does Proverbs 30:8 propose to the problem of riches?

5:15-16: Naked Come, Naked Go

Luther: "Even the richest of men cannot boast of anything more than of that from which he has been eating and drinking while he has been alive. Since, therefore, we shall not take anything with us, let us share it with others, using our riches as though they were flowing water or air. This is how we should think: "As I shall forsake my riches when I die, so I forsake them while I am living. Why, then, should I accumulate them with such great anxiety, when we cannot have anything more than a small mouthful?" (AE 15:91).

What similarity between the rich and poor does Luther highlight? What about in Ecclesiastes 5:15-16, Job 1:21, and 1 Timothy 6:7?

5:17: "All his days he eats in darkness in much vexation and sickness and anger."

What imagery does Solomon associate with grief & illness in this verse? For a common biblical euphemism for health and death, see Genesis 27:1; 48:10; 1 Samuel 3:2; Psalm 13:3; and Psalm 38:10.

Luther: "To eat in darkness, therefore, means to toil in sadness. A greedy workman, in fact, any greedy person, constantly finds something that he does not like and that he criticizes, because he is filled with cares and anxieties. He cannot eat his bread in happiness; he is always making accusations; he is always finding fault with his household," (AE 15:92).

Why are some people constantly negative and critical, according to Luther? What causes an evil conscience, according to Romans 2:15? What creates a good conscience? See 1 Timothy 1:5, 18–19; 3:9? What is the cure for an evil conscience? See Hebrews 10:22.

5:18–20: The Voice of Faith & the Heart of Ecclesiastes

The theme of the book has been mentioned in 2:24 and 3:13, but these verses develop those thoughts and provide the most complete summary of the book's message. How do these three verses summarize God's work and our response?

Luther: "In this way he has joy in his toil here, and here in the midst of evils he enters into Paradise. On the other hand, wicked men and misers and as many as do not follow this example in using the things of this life, begin already here to suffer torment and to be thrust down into hell," (AE 15:93).

How, according to Luther, can we enter into Paradise now, despite being in the midst of evils? What causes suffering, torment, and thrusts into hell? What sort of amnesia does verse 20 describe? Is it good or bad?

6:1–4: Wealth Does Not Satisfy

Luther: "For 'the traveler with an empty purse can sing in the presence of a robber.'" But the rich man is frightened by every bramble bush, and at the height of his happiness he is as miserable as possible... He thinks of nothing, wonders at nothing, yearns for nothing—except money. In the same way the ambitious man looks at nothing except honors. The lover does not look at his own wife but is always looking at another woman. That is, such people do not enjoy the good creatures that are present now. Thus the wicked begin their hell in this life, because they are deprived of the use of all the creatures and gifts of God, so that they never see the sun, which we nevertheless have every day. In other words, they do not rejoice in the gifts of God but are always looking for something else," (AE 15:96–97).

What advantage does the poor have over the rich, according to Luther? In what way can the things we love become a curse? Compare Ecclesiastes 1:8; 2:10–11; 4:8.

6:3–5: The Stillborn at Rest

In what sense is the stillborn better off than the person who does not know Christ? See Matthew 7:21–23. Notice how in these verses Solomon describes the stillborn as a person, better off than the discontent rich man, capable of resting. See also Psalm 139:13.

6:3–7: "His soul/appetite is not satisfied"

What enables us to enjoy what we have and share with others? See Ecclesiastes 5:19; 2 Corinthians 8:1–5; and Matthew 6:31–33.

Luther: "If, for example, old men could see the dangers that afflict youth, they would not want to be young. On the other hand, if young men could see the many discomforts of old age, they would be willing to bear their own discomforts and would not begrudge the elderly their comforts. But we do not do this; instead, we are always looking at what belongs to others and despising what belongs to us. Thus the rich miser looks at and desires what he does not have, but neglects what he does have. For 'his soul is not satisfied,' that is, he does not stick to his

assigned task. No one is content with his lot. The spectator of a play always imagines that he would perform it better. If I hear someone else preach, I think that I would be able to surpass him in many ways. A servant thinks likewise: "If I were king, I would administer everything with the utmost prudence."... If that kingdom were turned over to him, no one would be a greater fool than he... But the soul neglects its own job and is completely preoccupied with someone else's job, and so it does not do either one right. For whoever does not take care of his own things will do very poorly at taking care of other people's things," (AE 15:98–99).

Why does Luther say it is foolish to envy others? What suffers when we are preoccupied with envy? Why does Luther say we would do a poor job at taking care of other people's things if we don't take care of our own things?

When the laborers who worked all day compared their pay with those who worked fewer hours, how did they react? See Matthew 20:1–12. What should we remember before we become discontent with what God has provided? See Matthew 20:13–16 and Psalm 103:10.

Jerome: "Everything that human labor produces in this world is consumed by the mouth, ground by the teeth, and sent to the stomach for digestion. 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. The soul of the diner is afterwards not fulfilled, because he will again desire what he has just eaten," (Bollhagen, 225). In light of this, what counsel does the Lord give in John 6:27 and 4:13–14? What promise of our Lord does Hebrews 13:5 identify as the source of true contentment? What is good, according to Micah 6:8?

6:10: "He is not able to dispute with one stronger than he"

What lesson do we learn from Job 40:1–14?

Closing: O God, Forsake Me Not (LSB, 731)

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