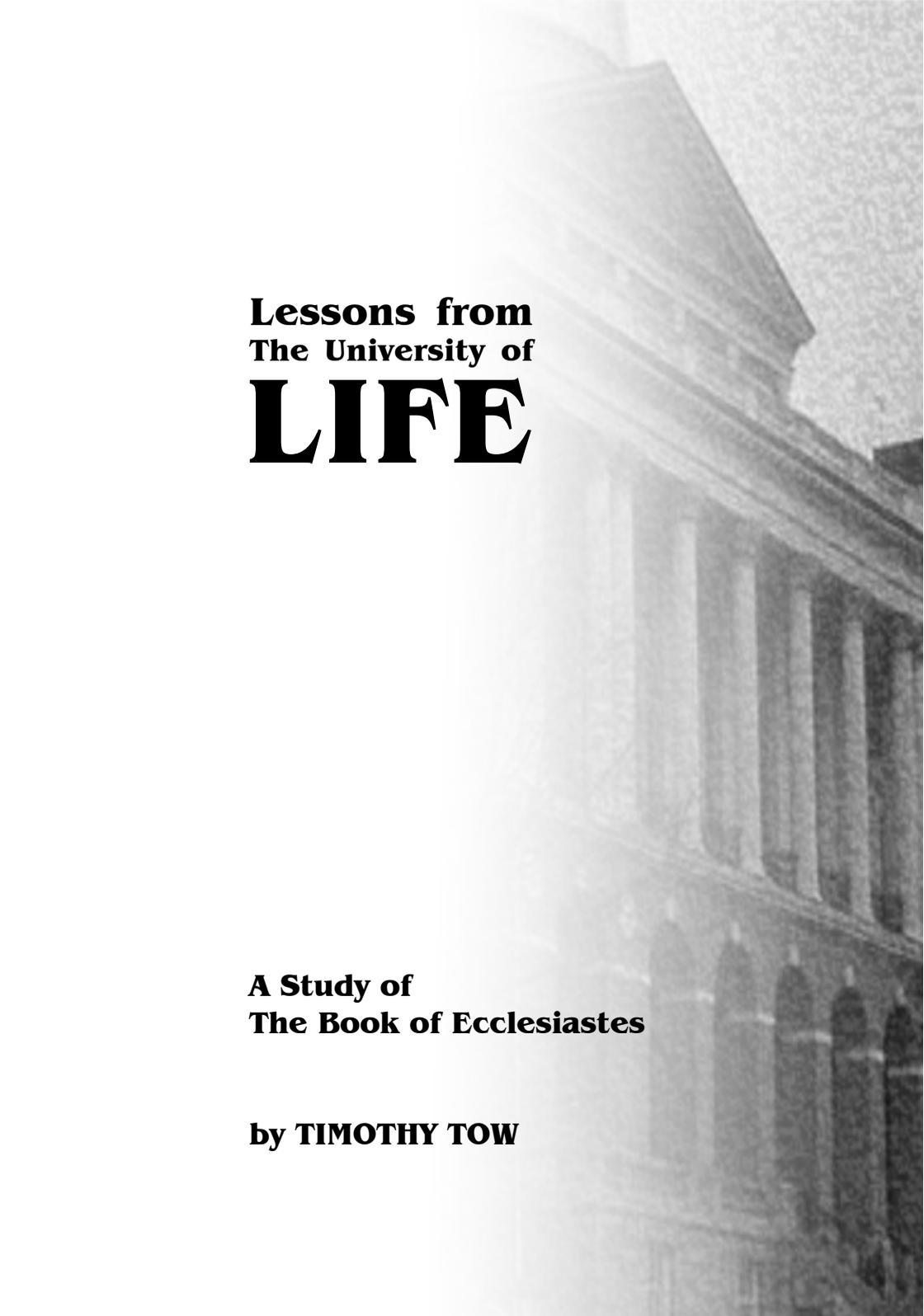


A Study of the Book of Ecclesiastes

**Lessons from
The University of
LIFE**

TIMOTHY TOW



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The Book of Ecclesiastes**

by TIMOTHY TOW

Lessons from the University of Life

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Under The Sun

T. Tow

John Sung Chorus



1. Un - der the sun we strive To what pur - pose is life?
2. Na - ked came we from the womb Na - ked we go to the tomb.
3. In days of strength and youth, Thy faith in God re - new



To earth we come from earth we go The earth goes on and on.
We eat and drink in dark - est gloom Birth, age and death comes too soon.
Be - fore His throne we all shall stand Will He say to Thee well done?



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PREFACE

Life is a deep well of mysteries. Hence Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, is challenged to delve into these mysteries. Under the sun, he found them a vanity of vanities. Life lived above the sun is God's answer to man.

The answers to Solomon's studies on the many aspects of life are rightly called "Lessons from the University of Life". The conclusive answer in the concluding chapter brings us to the conclusion of the whole matter — "*Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*" (Eccl. 12:13,14).

This book is highly evangelistic, against the atheism and agnosticism of yesterday or today. And Christ the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again from the dead is the only answer.

Timothy Tow

ECCLESIASTES I

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF THE PREACHER Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. ² Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity. ³ What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

⁴ *One* generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. ⁵ The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. ⁶ The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. ⁷ All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea *is* not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. ⁸ All things *are* full of labour; man cannot utter *it*: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

⁹ The thing that hath been, it *is that* which shall be; and that which is done *is* that which shall be done: and *there is* no new *thing* under the sun. ¹⁰ Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this *is* new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. ¹¹ *There is* no remembrance of former *things*; neither shall there be *any* remembrance of *things* that are to come with *those* that shall come after.

¹² I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things* that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath

God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. ¹⁴ I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. ¹⁵ *That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.* ¹⁶ I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. ¹⁷ And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. ¹⁸ For in much wisdom *is* much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

The author of this Book is none other than Solomon, son of David, king in Jerusalem. It is a Book written in his old age, after years of delving into the mysteries of life, in quest of happiness and of life's true meaning. He comes to the conclusion that all his labours "under the sun" come to nothing. "Vanity of vanities," the Preacher says, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity." All that is achieved apart from God is emptiness of emptiness. This reminds us of Jesus' saying, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mk 8:36).

The world in which we live is a passing shadow. Life is but a vapour (James 4:14). It goes in a cycle as the sun rises in the morning and goes down in the evening. It is like the wind that blows southwards and returns to the north. This is repeated again and again. As rivers keep on flowing into the sea, but the sea is not full, life goes on monotonously. Life is a laborious burden that brings no satisfaction. Under the curse of sin, man shall "eat bread in the sweat of his face" till he returns to the ground.

There is nothing new "under the sun," and when a man dies he is forgotten and the things that come after him, when they are gone will also be forgotten. Vanity of vanities! Take for example, President John Kennedy who was a very popular President of the United States. He was assassinated. In no time he was forgotten. His brother,

Robert Kennedy, the Attorney-General, was killed after him. I saw their graves in Washington. But both are little mentioned now.

I, Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I made a study on things that take place in this world and see men struggle in this life by God's appointment. All their works and attainments measure up to nothing. The crooked things they cannot make straight, the things that are lacking they cannot fill up.

I am the wisest over all in Jerusalem, before and now. I have wisely studied the psychology of people, even their mental sicknesses and stupidity to my own frustration. My conclusion is the more wisdom and knowledge you attain to study in these things, the more you are encumbered of vexation and sorrow. Vanity of vanities!

By way of application, all who are outside Christ, be they great politicians or simple folks, whatever they do comes to zero in the sight of God. Great men might have contributed much good to their country. But if they rejected the Saviour Jesus Christ in their lifetime it would profit them nothing.

On the other hand, when a man receives Christ as his Saviour, he is delivered from living under the sun to above the sun. He leaves man's kingdom of darkness to live in God's Kingdom of light. He lives now not for himself but for the glory of God. He may be a simple wage earner, but he serves the Lord with his tithes. He tries to extend God's Kingdom with whatever service he can render, by joining the choir, teaching in Sunday School, visiting mission stations to strengthen the hands of the missionaries. At home he devotes time to bring up his family and children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. He is not under the vanity of vanities, but he lives a vibrant life in Christ.

ECCLESIASTES II

**ALL THE ENERGY SOLOMON SPENDS
IN THE STUDY OF PSYCHOLOGY, ARTS,
SCIENCES, ETC. UNDER THE SUN IS VANITY.
IF DONE IN GOD'S WILL ABOVE THE SUN IT IS
ACCEPTABLE OF HIM AND MEANINGFUL**
Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also *is* vanity. ² I said of laughter, *It is* mad: and of mirth, What doeth it? ³ I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life. ⁴ I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: ⁵ I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all *kind of* fruits: ⁶ I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: ⁷ I got *me* servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: ⁸ I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, *as* musical instruments, and that of all sorts. ⁹ So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. ¹⁰ And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld

not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. ¹¹ Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all *was* vanity and vexation of spirit, and *there was* no profit under the sun.

¹² And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what *can* the man *do* that cometh after the king? *even* that which hath been already done. ¹³ Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. ¹⁴ The wise man's eyes *are* in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. ¹⁵ Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also *is* vanity. ¹⁶ For *there is* no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now *is* in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise *man*? as the fool.

¹⁷ Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun *is* grievous unto me: for all *is* vanity and vexation of spirit. ¹⁸ Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. ¹⁹ And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise *man* or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This *is* also vanity. ²⁰ Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. ²¹ For there is a man whose labour *is* in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it *for* his portion. This also *is* vanity and a great evil. ²² For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? ²³ For all his days *are* sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. ²⁴ *There is* nothing better for a man, *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it *was* from the hand of God. ²⁵ For who can eat, or who else can hasten *hereunto*,

more than I? ²⁶ For *God* giveth to a man that *is* good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to *him that is* good before God. This also *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

As I pondered in my heart, I decided to explore into the realms of pleasurable enjoyments. I found it all emptiness. And what is laughter? It is nothing but being out of my mind! And what is mirth or merrymaking?

I tried wine-drinking with self control and I studied the foolishness of men and what they should do “under the heaven” and throughout their lifetime.

I engaged in structural engineering, in horticulture, in botanical gardens and fruit orchards of all kinds. By constructing reservoirs around them, I irrigate all my plants.

I owned servants, male and female, who also begat children and I owned cattle, big and small, more than all others who had them in Jerusalem.

I amassed great stocks of silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and from the provinces. I formed choirs of male and female singers with the accompaniment of various musical instruments.

In all these pursuits I become the No. 1 in Jerusalem over those that were before me. I was the wise monarch of all I surveyed. I indulged in all that I could see and entered in the joys of my pursuits.

When I surveyed all the foregoing works, leaving nothing out, you see, all that I have done amounts to nothing because they were done “under the sun.”

Again I returned to study “wisdom, madness and folly,” and what can the man who comes after the king do? And all that is done before him? I perceive that wisdom far exceeds folly as light over darkness. The wise man sees clearly with a level head but the fool gropes in

darkness. But both are together in their day. So I said to myself, “As it happens to the fool so it happens to me the wise.” I conclude this is also vanity.

Neither is the wise remembered more than the fool and both will be forgotten. The wise man dies together with the fool. Therefore I hated to live because all my labours under the sun becomes grievous to me. All is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yes, I hated all my achievements under the sun because I must leave it to them who succeed me. But who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Nevertheless will he take over all I have laboured and wherein I have showed my wisdom? Being done “under the sun,” all is zero.

Here is a man who has wisely, intelligently and sanely done a good job to leave it to an unknown who will take it over. This is vanity and a great loss. What does a man gain from all he has worked for with much vexation of heart “under the sun?” All the days and nights that he spent in sorrow and grief come to nothing!

I conclude: There is nothing better for a man than that he should enjoy himself in food and drink and for his soul to enjoy good in his work as given him by God. Who can excel me in what I’ve just said?

To a man good in God’s sight He gives wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner He adds travail only to be heaped up as he deserves in God’s sight. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.

By way of application we may stray into Solomon’s path of spending unfruitful time in the pursuit of pleasure or even some useful hobby, or pursuing a higher degree for vain glory “under the sun.” We must know we are only stewards of all that we receive from God—whether it be time or talents.

There are those who bent their energies to serve God in their younger days, who backslide in their old age, like Solomon. Coming to church is no more cheer but chore. Giving to the Lord’s House in order that God’s work might go unhindered, dwindle from tithes to tit-bits.

But King Solomon repented. So can we. As we grow older the nearer we come to facing God. Will He say “well done” to us, or will He turn His face from us? Let us, whether young or old, return to giving our time, talents and energy to serve Him in any way we can. Then we live a life “above the sun” to His glory. Amen.

ECCLESIASTES III

A LESSON ON GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY

Ecclesiastes 3:1-10

To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ² A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted; ³ A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴ A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵ A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶ A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; ⁷ A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸ A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. ⁹ What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? ¹⁰ I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.

One without God and without hope, and such we were when we did not know Christ, lives under a blind Fate. Not knowing God he gropes in darkness from birth to death. All his life he struggles against evil in his own strength. He tries to avoid bad luck and find good luck. Thus he goes to the fortune teller. For safety in travel he would get advice from him or the medium. He must pick a good day for his marriage. He studies the horoscope to find answers for his many perplexities. He dies a Christless, hopeless death.

But the mysteries of life are revealed to the Christian. He has a God who is both Judge and loving Father. His God is the Father Almighty. He governs all things and man that He has made. He is sovereign over His own creation. But He also requires our human responsibility.

Matthew Henry observes,

Solomon proceeds to show that there is a season and a time for every one of God's purposes to take place, and for us to perform our duties, and prepare for the future. To expect unchanging happiness in a changing world must insure disappointment. To accommodate ourselves to our circumstances forms our duty and wisdom in this world. And however this state of things may appear to us, every one of these dispensations is beautiful in its season. God's whole plan of government of the world will be found altogether wise, just and good. Then let us seize the favourable opportunity for every good purpose and work. The time to die is fast approaching. If it had not been for sin, there would not have been a time for death. If it had not been for Christ we must have died without hope.

Our sins bring us all our calamities: to Christ we owe all our comforts and our hopes. Let us then receive present mercies with gratitude, bear transient afflictions with patience and expect our happiness from an unchanging God. Thus labour and sorrow fill the world. This travail is given to us, to make us weary of the world and desirous of the remaining rest. It is given us, that we may always have something to do. None of us were sent into the world to be idle.

In the light of Matthew Henry's commentary, what do you say about the recent SIA 006 air crash? Did it happen merely by the misjudgment of the pilot? If it happened with God's knowledge and in fact God had permitted it, would not God have a part to blame? The world being under the curse of sin, "to expect unchanging happiness in a changing world must insure disappointment. To accommodate ourselves to our circumstances forms our duty and

wisdom in this world. And however this state of things may appear to us, every one of these dispensations is beautiful in its season.” Job lost his ten children by fire and sword. His answer was “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

Coming back to our text: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted” (Eccles 3:1,2). By commenting on these two verses, we should have found the answers for the rest of the verses.

God’s sovereignty and His predestination over great events such as peace and war is reflected in God’s word to the prophet Jeremiah. “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant” (Jer 1:10). The nations during Jeremiah’s lifetime were due for judgment. So God used Jeremiah to rebuke them, to pronounce their doom, especially God’s people under the kings of Judah. They by their wicked sins had brought themselves under God’s punishing hand. The time has come to pluck up that which was planted. In the same way God will judge us, if as enlightened children we have backslided in sin and wickedness.

That which affects us most personally is the discourse on one’s birth and death. Our birthdays and death days are all predestined—when to come into this world and when to leave. To be born we are totally passive. But to die, as man’s limit of years approaches, we must get ready. Have you prepared to face your death day? Do you know where you will go after death? Do you know Christ as your Saviour?

Another day predestinated in your life is marriage. When you will be married and to whom is also determined by God. This is expressed by the statement, “to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing” (v.5). To marry is one thing, to make it a happy marriage

is another. You have to obey the rules of a happy marriage to attain to it. Here is your human responsibility.

“To refrain from embracing” may refer to separation or divorce. This is also your responsibility.

“To refrain from embracing” may mean not being able to get a life partner. In this case it is God’s sovereign will, as it is stated in Matt 19:12 “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: . . . and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake.” There are those naturally affected and others supernaturally affected. So there are single ladies not having found their life partners who give their lives to God to serve as missionaries. They live a fuller life in the Lord by refraining from embracing. But it all depends on whether they have received that higher call from God.

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (v.1). God’s outworkings in our lives are a high mystery and we must submit to our Creator. In whatever circumstances we also have a responsibility to discharge. Amen.

THE MYSTERIOUS WORKINGS OF GOD’S PROVIDENCE Ecclesiastes 3:11-15

¹¹ He hath made every *thing* beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. ¹² I know that *there is* no good in them, but for *a man* to rejoice, and to do good in his life. ¹³ And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it *is* the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him. ¹⁵ That which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been; and God requireth that which is past.

After God created the universe and the earth, He put mankind in the Garden of Eden to tend it. He did not leave His creation to go on its own. He continues to rule it by His providence. Everything that happens in the world is by His almighty outworkings, all the more after sin has entered in.

Because of sin, death has come to all men. The first murder occurred in Cain's slaying of Abel. This was the first disruption of human society. Because of sin herbivorous animals became carnivorous. Because of sin the order of nature is overturned. Earthquakes and floods, volcanoes and pestilences cause great miseries. Yet God rules and overrules them, so that the end results are the fulfilment of His perfect will.

While there are the outbursts of nature, the clash of war and bloodshed between nations, yet these all work out God's decretive will, so that it is said, "He hath made everything beautiful in His time," and we must be reconciled to it. "Everything" is as God has perfectly made it, whether we like it or not. God's workings in the world are past finding out. "He has established the course of nature with transcendent wisdom, yet He has also put obscurity in the midst of them. His works being intricate and mysterious, so that man, from the beginning to the end, cannot find out and perfectly comprehend the work God doeth."

For example, we have the case of Joseph. Being hated by his brothers he was sold as a slave into Egypt. The unfilial sons of Jacob lied to the father that his son's coat of many colours was soaked with blood, suggesting he was killed by some wild animal. As God was with Joseph, He kept him from all harm. Potiphar his Egyptian master promoted him to chief steward of the house. For refusing sex to Potiphar's wife he was put into prison. From prison, however, he was promoted for his supernatural talents to interpret dreams to Pharaoh's House. When he interpreted Pharaoh's dreams that there would be seven years bountiful harvest and seven years of famine Joseph was made Prime Minister.

When the famine began to take its toll, Jacob and his sons were driven to seek sustenance in Egypt. It was then that the old father discovered the truth of his beloved son Joseph. When Jacob died all the guilty brothers begged for mercy from Joseph for what they had done. Joseph generously forgave them all, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen 50:20).

Surely, you must say, “He hath made every thing (both good and bad) to work out beautifully in his time” (Eccles 3:11).

God has put us to live in this world. Though we cannot have all the answers for living in this world we have to answer to God. It is our duty to do good and in doing good we enjoy the blessings of earth such as in having a good appetite. “Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Ps 103:5).

Conversely speaking, one who knows it is his duty to do good but instead he does bad will not receive the blessings of earth, of living a healthy, happy life. Instead he may be plagued with sickness leading to sorrow and despair.

Whatever happens God is the determining factor that men might fear Him. Whether it is yesterday, today or tomorrow and circumstances change, He is the same, forever more.

ABUSERS OF POWER WHOSE END IS NO BETTER THAN THE BEASTS Ecclesiastes 3:16-22

¹⁶ And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, *that* wickedness *was* there; and the place of righteousness, *that* iniquity *was* there. ¹⁷ I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for *there is* a time there for every purpose and for every work. ¹⁸ I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they

themselves are beasts. ¹⁹ For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all *is* vanity. ²⁰ All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. ²¹ Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? ²² Wherefore I perceive that *there is* nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that *is* his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

There are those in high places of authority, whether the throne or the judgment seat, who abuse their powers. Fearing neither God nor men they think a mighty lot of themselves. But God is the final Judge who will judge righteously. This may take time. David says, “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God” (II Sam 23:3).

But what is man even in his highest estate? When King Herod usurped the glory of God, “immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost” (Acts 12:23). His lot was no better than the four-footed beasts. And he died prematurely.

Man and beast have a common destination. Both die. Both die when they breathe their last. Is man better than beast? All is emptiness. Both man and beast are made from the earth. They are dust. When they die, being made of earth and dust, they are returned to dust. When they die we bury them.

But there is a great difference between man and beast in the realm of the spirit. When the beast dies its spirit goes downwards, to earth. This means that its life comes to extinction. When we kill an animal to eat, its flesh becomes our food. There is no continuation of existence. (There is a movement in Australia that to kill a cow for food, it is murder. Some Chinese also defer from eating beef because the ox is the breadwinner for the family.)

When a man dies his breath goes upwards. Man has a soul that lives forever, for good or for bad. There is judgment after death. This solemn fact is rejected by the world. The mass of mankind prefer to bury their heads in the sand. Thus they choose to enjoy the pleasures of sin in this life, like those who contract aids, and they are satisfied because they persist in their error to say man dies like the beast. Death is the end of everything.

This concept has come from Darwin's godless doctrine of evolution. For has not man evolved from apes? So, we are no better than animals. Another erroneous notion about man's destiny is recently spread by New Evangelicalism. There is no everlasting punishment under a God of love. Hence the renewed belief of annihilationism. Annihilationism has been the teaching of Seventh-Day Adventists. But Jesus affirms three times in Mark 9:43-48, "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." Hellfire is real.

The account of Lazarus and the Rich Man states clearly that when Lazarus died, he went to Paradise to be with Abraham. When the Rich Man died he went to Hades where he was so tormented by fire that he called to Abraham to bid Lazarus bring him water to cool his tongue.

Neither is there a second chance to make good. Heaven and hell are decided by every soul in this lifetime. So Protestants do not pray for the dead. But Roman Catholics teach there is a Purgatory from which you can be cleansed before entering heaven.

Since man will live eternally with God (and that only by believing in His only Begotten Son) let him work out his salvation with rejoicing for that is his portion of blessing in eternal enjoyment. Let his spirit go upward, not “downward.”

ECCLESIASTES IV

ON OPPRESSION, ENVY, SLOTHFULNESS AND COVETOUSNESS Ecclesiastes 4:1-8

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of *such as were* oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors *there was* power; but they had no comforter. ² Wherefore I praised the dead which are already dead more than the living which are yet alive. ³ Yea, better *is he* than both they, which hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

⁴ Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This *is* also vanity and vexation of spirit. ⁵ The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh. ⁶ Better *is* an handful *with* quietness, than both the hands full *with* travail and vexation of spirit.

⁷ Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun. ⁸ There is one *alone*, and *there is* not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet *is there* no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither *saith he*, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This *is* also vanity, yea, it *is* a sore travail.

Solomon makes a study of four social evils.

The first one is oppression—big fish eat small fish. It grieves him to see might prevail over right under the sun, i.e. in a sinful

world. To see the oppressed having nowhere to turn, no one to help. Oh the tears that are shed in lonely misery! Is this not the picture of an evil society?

Such evil occurs not only in the secular world, but also inside an apostate church. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Matt 23:14). Is this not oppression, big fish eat small fish, to devour the livelihood of widows? We pray such evil may not infiltrate into true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In order to guard oneself from being exploited I have taught my children and students to work hard and be strong, that instead of being gobbled up they may help the weak and stand up for the underprivileged.

Having nowhere to turn, men are tempted to hate life and to envy those that are dead and lying in their graves, and even wishing they had never been born. Solomon tends to agree with them since under the sun, as he stresses again and again, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.

When we consider the life of Christians who have passed on to glory, it seems that is better than Christians still living in the world. But a Christian, though suffering in this life must not wish to die early, because he is living to glorify God. Like the apostle Paul he is satisfied whether he is abased or he abounds (Phil 4:12). The opposite is true for the ungodly when they begin to realise there is God’s judgment in the next life. It is they who should wish they had never been born.

Solomon having considered the hateful character of “the big fish” and the fate endured under them by “the small fish,” proceeds to discover another evil. It is envy. When a man labours hard and attains to good success in life he draws envy and antagonism from all around him. And the higher he rises, the more he is hated.

Conversely there are others who become lazy and slothful. Not able to maintain their livelihood, they eat their own flesh. They eat into their own reserves. Idleness is a sin that inflicts punishment upon itself.

A Christian should never indulge in laziness. Here is Paul's injunction to the Thessalonians, setting himself an example to the slothful. "For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you . . . For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (II Thess 3:7-10). Paul's injunction to work hard for one's upkeep became Margaret Thatcher's political philosophy. Quoting John Wesley's expanded teaching on Paul's injunction, Thatcher agrees, "Earn all you can, Save all you can, Give all you can." Under Thatcher's 11-year rule Britain rose to great prosperity.

While there are the lazy bones who would not work and thus they eat into their own flesh, there are those on the other extreme who work to gather an overabundance. The more they get, the more they want. It is like a friend of mine who entered the Post World War II rat race. He told me he must make his first million. This became his vexation of spirit. Did he eat with joy and satisfaction? He could never be satisfied.

The golden mean between the lazy and the over ambitious is to earn an honest living. With contentment he eats his meals in thankfulness to God. Paul says this is great gain (I Tim 6:6).

This leads us finally to what Solomon sees to be a covetous man. This arises from selfishness. Matthew Henry says, "There is one alone, that minds none but himself, cares for nobody. There is not a second, none to take care of but himself; yet there is no end of his labour. He will scarcely allow necessary rest to himself and those he employs. He does not confine himself to his own calling, but is for

having a hand in anything he can get by. He never thinks he has enough. His eye is not satisfied with riches. He has enough for his calling, for his family, for living decently in the world, but he has not enough for his eyes. . . He denies the comfort of what he has . . . many are so upon the world, that in pursuit of it they deprive their souls of good here and forever.”

Such a covetous man has no thought of God but himself. When he dies his possessions go to his distant relatives. What shall it profit him to scrape and grasp so much with not a thought for God and to relinquish a life’s savings to them who cared not for him?

ONE, TWO, THREE, AS HAPPY AS CAN BE **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

⁹ Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. ¹⁰ For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him *that is* alone when he falleth; for *he hath* not another to help him up. ¹¹ Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm *alone*? ¹² And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

No man is an island to himself. Man is a gregarious animal, like sheep gathering into a flock. Nor can a Christian thrive without fellowship with another Christian.

So, also it is with the sacred bond of marriage. When God made man, male and female, He said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife” (Gen 2:24). Matthew Henry says, “In marriage a man has more satisfaction who labours hard to maintain a family he loves than the miser has in his toil.”

Faithful friendship produces united strength and safety, “and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov 18:24). “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him

that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up” (Eccles 4:9,10). Thus, when Joshua wanted to know the condition of Jericho which he was going to conquer, he sent two spies to do the job. Jesus sent seventy preachers, but two by two, that they might be a help one to another.

“Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone”? This refers to the mutual warmth between husband and wife in a cold wintry night. Spiritually speaking a couple with mutual consultation is wiser than a single person. A pastor who has a prudent wife to watch his steps is kept from stumbling. From experience, I have counselled husbands to thank God for wives who nag them, that they become more perfect. “And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him.” Hence the saying, behind every man there is a woman.

“And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Now, we know every rope is made up of three strands. Without the third strand, a two-fold cord soon disintegrates. Who is the third cord? It is the Spirit of Christ. Whether it be between two friends or husband and wife, if Christ is the third cord that binds them, their strength will be greater than ever. Their combined strength with Christ as the third cord will not increase double but tenfold. “One will chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight” (Deut 32:30).

Here is the case of Hannah and her husband Elkanah. Hannah vowed to give Samuel her son to serve the Lord all his life. Elkanah did not object, but gladly cooperated with her to bring Samuel to Eli when he was weaned. Elkanah provided all the needed sacrifices. God accepted Hannah’s vow, so that when Samuel grew up he became a great prophet and was known as the Second Moses. We must not forget the part played by Hannah’s loving husband.

Two are better than one, but one is better than nothing. If the one mentioned here is a devout Christian, then he or she is also good. I am referring to single ladies especially. I have observed some of them in the Church. Being more advanced in years and being career

women, they finally choose to serve the Lord. They give their lives to become missionaries. One single lady in this case is not only good, but very good!

How many a vacancy in the mission field is filled by women, because the men cannot be found. When I visited Ho Chi Minh City in 1995 I came to know a lady preacher there. During the Vietnam War she stood in the gap of nine vacant pulpits, because the pastors of these nine churches had fled. She took care of all the nine churches to face up to the Communists. Because she was a saintly woman the Communists respected her. This lady preacher was a classmate of Ng Sang Chiew when they studied together in Hong Kong in the same seminary. One woman, with God, won the day.

In the Old Testament there is the example of Deborah. A woman judge whom God had raised, she led the Israelite army with General Barak to fight Sisera with his nine hundred chariots. She defeated him. Significantly Sisera was delivered into the hands of another woman, Jael by name, who single-handedly killed him and brought peace to the land.

The amazing thing is that single women rather than men, have made good for the glory of God. In Christ there is neither male nor female (Gal 3:28). Certain leaders of the Reformed Faith have totally forbidden women from taking any leadership in the church, to their own undoing. But we have every Bible pattern for us to follow, which brings us good success.

“One, two, three, as happy as can be.” Two are better than one. Three are better than two. One is better than nothing! One can be good, and very good! By God’s appointment that one is a woman. Amen.

A FOOLISH OLD KING, A POOR WISE YOUNG MAN, AND THE FICKLE-MINDED MASSES

Ecclesiastes 4:13-16

¹³ Better *is* a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. ¹⁴ For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also *he that is* born in his kingdom becometh poor. ¹⁵ I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. ¹⁶ *There is* no end of all the people, *even* of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also *is* vanity and vexation of spirit.

There is a Chinese saying, “The old relapses into childish foolishness.” When that happens to an old and foolish king who refuses counselling, will he not bring the whole kingdom into chaos?

Is Solomon speaking from his own experience? This is what is recorded of him. “But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because

his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant” (I Kings 11:1-11).

Could you ever imagine the depth of degradation into which such a wise king as Solomon had fallen? Indeed, “better is a poor and wise child than an old and foolish king in Solomon.”

Such a poor and wise child (or young man) who works himself out of prison might refer to Joseph, how his God had delivered him from false accusation to prime minister of Egypt. Is not Joseph who kept his high station of life more to be respected than Solomon, at first a great king but ended up rejected of God and man by his folly? Matthew Henry comments, by way of application, “How honourable and happy are those who by faith in the Son of God, which is the true wisdom, are advanced from the bondage of sin and Satan, to the glorious kingdom that cannot be moved.”

Solomon observes another matter relative to kings and people. This concerns the foolishness of the common people. Their folly is that they are never satisfied, they are continually fond of changes. This happens in every generation, to the great grief of kings, even kings who try to please the people. Such a king is David.

In dealing with the murder of Abner, Saul’s Commander-in-Chief by the hand of Joab, David took pains to mourn Abner’s assassination to show his displeasure against Joab. “And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people” (II Sam 3:36).

In spite of David’s high standing in his kingdom, when Absalom his son rebelled against him the majority of the people joined in the rebellion. See the fickle-mindedness of the masses. This is vanity and

vexation of spirit. Because David was truly a good king, God overruled and overturned the plot. In God we enjoy stability and security!

Comments Matthew Henry again, by way of application, “But the willing servants of the Lord Jesus, our King, rejoice in Him alone, from age to age, and they will love Him, more and more to all eternity, hear of, trust in and obey Him, henceforth and to the end of this world.”

“Better is a poor and a wise child than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished. For out of prison he cometh to reign; whereas also he that is born in his kingdom becometh poor. I considered all the living which walk under the sun, with the second child that shall stand up in his stead. There is no end of all the people, even of all that have been before them: they also that come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit” (Eccles 4:13-16).

ECCLESIASTES V

THREE THINGS TO KEEP (WATCH OVER) WHEN YOU APPEAR BEFORE GOD Ecclesiastes 5:1-8

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. ² Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God: for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. ³ For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice *is known* by multitude of words.

⁴ When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. ⁵ Better *is it* that thou shouldst not vow, than that thou shouldst vow and not pay. ⁶ Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it *was* an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? ⁷ For in the multitude of dreams and many words *there are* also *divers* vanities: but fear thou God. ⁸ If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for *he that is* higher than the highest regardeth; and *there be* higher than they.

First, “keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.” Prov 19:2 says, “And he that hasteth with his feet sinneth.” The origin of these two injunctions is traced to Ex 3:5, “And he said, Draw not

nigh hither: put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.”

From Ex 3:5 has come the practice of Korean Churches especially. In Korea, when a preacher ascends the pulpit, he must take off his shoes to remind himself he is standing on holy ground.

When I was holding a gospel campaign in Korea 1960, I had to take off my shoes whenever I ascended the pulpit. My interpreter Rev Han had to do the same. One night, after preaching, when we descended the pulpit, lo and behold, his pair of new shoes had disappeared. A thief walked away with them. He fortunately bought another pair from the shoe store, for it was early in the evening.

In Singapore and other parts of the world I know we have not the custom of taking off the shoes when we preach. The lesson however is, when we come to worship we must keep our feet in the sense of full reverence in His presence.

To keep not only our feet, but also the posture of our body. That is why pews are made to seating us straight that we attentively hear the message. “and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil” (Eccles 5:1)

What is spoken by the mouth outwardly comes from the heart inwardly. The second thing is to keep (watch over) our heart. Be composed, and meditate within that your thoughts are aright. Before God, be subdued that you may not err from His holy will. A garrulous person, who talks without thinking, is a foolish person. A reverent worshipper is few of words and much in thoughts. Thus, while others talk, and women are of more words than men, Mary the mother of our Lord, pondered in her heart (Lk 2:19, 51).

The third thing is keep (watch over) our mouth. “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few” (v.2). This applies the more when we vow, when we make a solemn promise before God. Vows are legitimate and are made freely before God as a means to seek His help in time of need.

This was taken by Hannah, Samuel's mother. When she found that her womb was shut and Peninnah her husband's other wife had many children, she cried unto the Lord that should the Lord give her a man-child she would offer him back to Him all the days of his life. God honoured her vow and Samuel became a mighty prophet.

As you have read my autobiography, *Son of a Mother's Vow*, I was a rebellious son who broke my mother's vow. As a result my Mother's death was quickly followed up in five weeks by my seven-month daughter's death. Realising the error of breaking my mother's vow, I thoroughly repented. By His mercies, He restored me to His favour. He has sustained me to this day in my service of Him.

Here is a lesson for everyone of you who has vowed or solemnly promised before the Lord. See that you do not smother the words you had uttered before the Lord. "When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands" (Eccles 5:4-6).

Not only should we be careful in words in our vows to God, we must remember that God is hearing words ordinarily spoken, rambling words like those blurting out of a dream. Therefore no evil speaking, no frivolous talking from an empty mind.

Thus the perverse judgments from unrighteous judges are under the surveillance of the Almighty God. You can rest assured that right will prevail over might in the end.

The three things we must keep (watch over) are our feet, our heart and our mouth. Amen.

THE EMPTINESS OF RICHES

Ecclesiastes 5:9-17

⁹ Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king *himself* is served by the field. ¹⁰ He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this *is* also vanity. ¹¹ When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good *is there* to the owners thereof, saving the beholding *of them* with their eyes? ¹² The sleep of a labouring man *is* sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. ¹³ There is a sore evil *which* I have seen under the sun, *namely*, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. ¹⁴ But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and *there is* nothing in his hand. ¹⁵ As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. ¹⁶ And this also *is* a sore evil, *that* in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? ¹⁷ All his days also he eateth in darkness, and *he hath* much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

God provides mankind liberally from the produce of the earth, whether to the ruler of the realm or to the common people. From the field comes the grain, from the farm, meat, from the sea, fish. He sends the rains, and water is free flowing. Man should be satisfied with the necessities of life God has provided.

But man is not satisfied with natural provisions. He wants more and more. He wants to amass much more than he needs. The more he gets the more he wants. I had a friend during the Japanese occupation. He bought and sold in the black market and made some money. When the War was over, he told me he must now make a million—to satisfy his craving for riches. But he never made it. Solomon says, “This is vanity.” How true!

When a businessman expands his business he has to spend the more with its growth. He has to hire more hands and pay their

salaries. Whether he earns correspondingly or not, he has to upkeep them. An architect friend of mine has a sizeable staff. He has a perennial headache and that is to pay their salaries on time. Sometimes it is hard to make ends meet. He sighed deeply, “I wish I were a salary drawing draughtsman than a *towkay* of an architect. Then I wouldn’t have to worry my head off.”

Herein we see how an employee enjoys a good sleep whether he is paid high or low, but the rich towkay with all his burdens can never enjoy sound sleep. The rich fool in Jesus’ parable, Luke 12:16, illustrates. As his goods increased so that his warehouse became too small for storage, he planned to pull it down and build bigger for his increased wealth. Instead of a good sleep he made calculations all night. The Lord came to him and said, “You will die tonight and your new warehouse will become whose property?” This rich man is a poor man before God.

To become rich tends to be hurtful. It makes a man conceited, and in his security, he loves the world even more. This draws him away from God and duty. This makes him forget it is the Lord who has given him power to get wealth (Deut 8:18). When he had just enough, he paid regularly his tithe. But what a paradox, when he becomes richer he gives the lesser.

Riches become a curse to those who possess them. Riches are perishing things and we cannot stop them. Thus Paul exhorts Timothy, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. 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. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (I Tim 6:6-10).

“In respect of the body the dust shall return to the earth as it was. But sad is our case if the soul returns as it came. For we were born in

sin, and if we die in sin, unsanctified, we had better never have been born. That seems the case here spoken” (Matthew Henry).

What a life for one to spend his days in endless care and toil, to live fretfully and end his hours in sorrow and anger until he breathes his last. Such people have laboured only for the wind and when they die like the wind they are gone to nowhere.

How sad a life is the worldling when he does not sorrow for his sins and come to repentance. He is angry at the providence of God, angry at his sickness, angry at all around him, which increases his affliction till his death. But a good man, one who is saved, has a happy ending though he goes through sickness and suffering. Truly a rich man’s life, without God, is vanity of vanities.

THE RIGHT USE OF RICHES IN THE FEAR OF GOD Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

¹⁸ Behold *that* which I have seen: *it is* good and comely *for one* to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it *is* his portion. ¹⁹ Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this *is* the gift of God. ²⁰ For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth *him* in the joy of his heart.

Life is a gift from God. And how long we live this life is appointed of God (Job 14:5). God also appoints the kind of job we take. Let us do a good job and serve Him with gladness and not as a drudgery. We should not complain about our job like so many today, but praise the Lord for it. Let us not try to grasp at more business than we can go through without frustration. Godly contentment is great gain.

When God has blessed our lives with riches it is legitimate for us to enjoy them, thanking Him for His goodness. We can live in a bigger house and drive a better car, but remember we are not *towkays* but stewards. And “remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deut 8:18). Therefore we must live frugally that we may give our dues to the Lord. We save up to support the work of His Church and missions. How sad it is when we over-commit ourselves in over-spending and give back to God our leftovers.

In the fear of God let us be drawn to Jesus our Saviour who says, “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (Jn 6:27). “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33).

ECCLESIASTES VI

THE VANITY OF RICHES WITHOUT POWER TO ENJOY THEM, AND OF LONG LIFE WITH A SAD END Ecclesiastes 6:1-6

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it *is* common among men: ² A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it: this *is* vanity, and it *is* an evil disease. ³ If a man beget an hundred *children*, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also *that* he have no burial; I say, *that* an untimely birth *is* better than he. ⁴ For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. ⁵ Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known *any thing*: this hath more rest than the other. ⁶ Yea, though he live a thousand years twice *told*, yet hath he seen no good: do not all go to one place?

Conversely, Solomon observes a common evil in the affairs of men. Here is a rich man and honourable who has everything he wants, but God gives him no power to enjoy what he has got. By one means or another, be it sickness or bodily injury, a man is deprived of the legitimate enjoyment of his wealth. He has money aplenty but no appetite to eat the choicest food. Appetite is a blessing to our palate from God. “Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Ps 103:5). The enjoyment thereof

is taken over by another person. Strangers, those outside of his family, come and devour his substance. They usurp his properties. Is this not a case of vanity of vanities?

Solomon enlarges (vv. 3-6) on the case of a man of means, not only possessing great wealth and honour, but also living a long life. And should he beget a hundred children, but he does not have a happy life, and ends up without a decent burial, of what profit is it to him? I say it were better he had a premature birth. For he had lived a meaningless life, and he exhibited a life without a purpose. He finally departed in darkness and was forgotten — out of sight, out of mind.

If an untimely birth has had no enjoyment, neither has it had suffering. To end up immediately in the grave without tasting the miseries of human life is far better. (Buddhist philosophy says life is a sea of sorrows.) He who has entered into life only for one moment, to quit it the next, has a better lot than he who has lived long but only to suffer.

Truly, a life without Christ, is hell! This is vanity of vanities. But a life lived for God is not only meaningful but profitable. Jesus says to Peter, and His other disciples, “Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt 19:28,29).

THE VANITY OF OUTWARD THINGS, OF INWARD DESIRES, AND OF ALL CREATED ENJOYMENTS

Ecclesiastes 6:7-12

⁷ All the labour of man *is* for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled. ⁸ For what hath the wise more than the fool? what hath the poor, that knoweth to walk before the

living? ⁹ Better *is* the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire: this *is* also vanity and vexation of spirit. ¹⁰ That which hath been is named already, and it is known that it *is* man: neither may he contend with him that is mightier than he.

¹¹ Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what *is* man the better? ¹² For who knoweth what *is* good for man in *this* life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?

“All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.” This is like saying a man is heaping up worldly wealth to make him happy but he is never satisfied. When he has earned his million, he will think of the billion. Can he be really happy?

One who amasses riches may think himself to be wise, but if it is only perishable riches in God’s eyes, he is a fool. Jesus tells the parable of a rich man who has grown so rich that he has no room to store his goods. He decides to pull down his storehouse and build a bigger one. And he says to himself, “My soul, you have now plenty laid up that will last for years. Now you can eat, drink and be merry.” But God says to him, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Lk 12:20-21).

The story is told of a Singapore merchant who wanted to build the tallest building in Singapore, 102 storeys like the Empire State Building in New York. The Government allowed him 51 storeys, half of what he desired. Jovially, to reply to him who told me this story, “If he sought my help I would plan 204 storeys, so that when Government allows him half of what he wanted, he would get his 102 storeys.”

Thus we see those who are rich and consider themselves wise to be no better than those considered to be foolish. The poor foolish man may paradoxically be wiser than the rich and the wise. The poor man who is contented with his station of life and conducts himself

prudently is far better than the dissatisfied and restless rich man. Thus Paul admonishes, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (I Tim 6:6-8).

The appetite, not filled, refers to more than worldly wealth, those more sinful ones known to the heart that are never satiable to the spirit. Here Paul admonishes again, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:5-10).

Whatever we attain in this world, still we are but men. Whatever riches we have amassed ourselves cannot set us above the common events of human life. Nor can we strive with Divine Providence. Man cannot contend with Him that is mightier than he.

Seeing that the many things which men pursue on earth only form and increase vanities, what is man better than his worldly devices? For who can tell what is good for man in this vain life that passes as a shadow?

If all the comforts of life be vanity, life itself can have no great reality in it to become a happiness for us. But in returning to Jesus Christ we may find rest unto our souls.

ECCLESIASTES VII

SALT vs. SUGAR Ecclesiastes 7:1-6

A good name *is* better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth. ² *It is* better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that *is* the end of all men; and the living will lay *it* to his heart. ³ Sorrow *is* better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. ⁴ The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth. ⁵ *It is* better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools. ⁶ For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so *is* the laughter of the fool: this also *is* vanity.

The story is told of two ministers and what presentations they made to their king. The minister of sugar presented sugar and he was promoted. The minister of salt presented salt, and he lost his head. That is the way of all flesh.

I. What Solomon, whose wisdom comes from God, teaches is the reverse. There are salt and sugar elements in our life for consideration, and salt rather is better.

“A good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death than the day of one's birth” (v.1). A good reputation, in Chinese teaching, is one's second life. By all means we must guard it. Once we do something wrong, the fragrance of it is gone. It stinks thereafter forever. Hence a good name is better than precious ointment. This is a salt admonition, and not sugar. Sugar melts

sweetly in the mouth for a little while, but salt can preserve what we eat for a long time.

II. “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart ... The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth” (verses 2,4). Why is the day of death better than the day of one’s birth? **Because death is the conclusion of a life of struggles, but birth is the beginning**—in a sinful world of vexation and vanity. So it is better to attend a funeral than to go to a feast, **for it is the conclusion of life and those who attend funerals will be sobered down to the reality of life.**

“It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). Death confronts us whether we are prepared to meet it. Where will you end up, in heaven or in hell?

A little girl of four we know was confronted by death in the form of a coffin brought to Church for the memorial service. She told her father she was scared of death. The father showed the little daughter the way of escape by turning to the Lord Jesus Christ—the Son of God who died on the cross to take away all her sins. She readily received the Lord into her heart. She now turns to Jesus whenever the thought of death scares her.

While it is legitimate to attend both funerals and wedding parties, it will do us more good to go to funerals. Considering how apt we are to be vain and secure at a wedding party, it is preferable to go to the house of mourning to learn from the dead. Jesus went to a wedding feast once but three times to the funeral. At the wedding feast our Lord joined them in earthly happiness, at the funerals He raised the dead to life and further He gave everlasting life to those who trusted in Him.

III. “Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better” (v.3). Why is sorrow better than laughter? Because it is more agreeable to our earthly life,

although it goes against our senses. **In going to a house of mourning and sorrow we learn the solemnity of life**, of our sins and folly. We are drawn to sympathise with the dead and what they have suffered before death. By the sadness of the countenance the heart is cleansed. We are brought closer to God.

IV. “It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools” (v.5). It is better to be admonished by the wise than by the flattery of the foolish. To readily accept the constructive criticisms of our friends is better than hearing the praises of empty-headed people.

“For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool: this also is vanity” (v.6). Moreover the laughter of an empty-headed fellow is noisy and flashy and in one minute it is gone. It is void of any substance. His word leads others only to perdition. Solomon has plenty to comment on flattery, “A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet” (Prov 29:5) and “He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him” (Prov 27:14). Flattery is sugar, the advice of a wise man is salt.

ON OPPRESSION, BRIBERY, ANGER, DISCONTENT Ecclesiastes 7:7-22

⁷ Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart. ⁸ Better *is* the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: *and* the patient in spirit *is* better than the proud in spirit. ⁹ Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools. ¹⁰ Say not thou, What is *the cause* that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this.

¹¹ Wisdom *is* good with an inheritance: and *by it there is* profit to them that see the sun. ¹² For wisdom *is* a defence, *and* money *is* a defence: but the excellency of knowledge *is, that* wisdom giveth life to them that have it. ¹³ Consider the work of

God: for who can make *that* straight, which he hath made crooked? ¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him. ¹⁵ All *things* have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just *man* that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked *man* that longeth *his life* in his wickedness. ¹⁶ Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldst thou destroy thyself? ¹⁷ Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldst thou die before thy time? ¹⁸ *It is* good that thou shouldst take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all. ¹⁹ Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty *men* which are in the city. ²⁰ For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. ²¹ Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: ²² For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

Wicked people use hard and soft tactics to achieve their nefarious ends. The hard tactics are oppression, threats and fears in their accusation of the good and wise. These tactics were used by the Chinese Communists on Wang Ming Tao, China's No. 1 Christian. Oppression, threats and fears were so piled up against him that he capitulated to this mental torture and he became momentarily deranged. This made him sign a statement tantamount to denying his Lord. By God's grace Wang Ming Tao later on awoke from his mistake and he was brave enough to recant, for which he was sentenced to life imprisonment. He was released after 23 years.

The soft tactics used by the wicked is to bribe the judge with a gift. Exod 23:8 says, "And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous." Deut 16:19 enjoins, "Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous."

There is a Chinese proverb that says the final verdict of a man's achievements cannot be determined until the coffin lid is placed over his body. This is what is meant by "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof." Take the case of German Chancellor Kohl. What a great leader he was in his term of office. When he lost in the new elections to another, he was investigated and found to have misused funds, which led further to his downfall.

One of the things to remember in order to succeed is to have self-control over oneself. David Marshall lost out to Lee Kuan Yew because he could not control his temper but LKY could. Learn to keep cool always. They who retain anger in their hearts become fools.

Don't compare the present with the past and say the past is better than the present. It all depends, for the present, in fact, is better than the past. It depends more on our hearts. If our hearts are in right relation with God, our times could be better. The fact is God has always been good, and men are always bad, and if in some respects the times are worse than they have been, perhaps in other respects they are better.

Wisdom Transcends All

In whatever we do, what we need is wisdom. Wisdom transcends inheritance and by it there is profit. It contributes to our safety and shelters us from the storms of life more than money.

Here are the precepts of wisdom. Consider the work of God (v.13). Every work of God is wise and good and we must accommodate ourselves to His providential outworkings. God has so intermingled prosperity and adversity in our life that we must depend on Him through every vicissitude of life.

In this world dominated by sin, we are confronted with a righteous man taken by calamity and a wicked man enjoying longevity. Wisdom will teach us this happens under a just and sovereign God who is the final judge. Be not righteous overmuch and

make not yourself over wise, nor busy yourself in other man's matters, lest you be destroyed. But rather keep from wickedness and foolish deeds which could bring a quick end to your life. What we must hold to is to fear God Himself, looking to Him and not at others.

Wisdom transcends all. Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten mighty men who are in the city. In times of turmoil or recession we need a wise Government, we need brain than brawn.

“There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (v.20). We sin even in our doing good, for man is so imperfect. So wisdom teaches us not to heed all words that are spoken, lest you hear your own servant talking bad of you. For you know yourself how you often talk bad of others.

“A HERO CAN HARDLY GO THROUGH BEAUTY’S GATE” Ecclesiastes 7:23-29

²³ All this have I proved by wisdom: I said, I will be wise; but it *was* far from me. ²⁴ That which is far off, and exceeding deep, who can find it out? ²⁵ I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason *of things*, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness *and* madness: ²⁶ And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart *is* snares and nets, *and* her hands *as* bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her. ²⁷ Behold, this have I found, saith the preacher, *counting* one by one, to find out the account: ²⁸ Which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: one man among a thousand have I found; but a woman among all those have I not found. ²⁹ Lo, this only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.

This is a Chinese saying on woman's power over man. Especially when he is mesmerised by her charms.

Solomon with all his God-given wisdom is severely shaken when he is led astray into the pleasures of sin. For the pleasures of sin can easily overpower, by Satan's wiles, a wise man such as Solomon. This happened to David when only a glance of his eyes brought him down before Bathsheba. Indeed, in Solomon's case, he wandered into the labyrinth of sinful pleasures where he encountered the "wickedness of folly", yea even of "madness." He himself became Mr Folly and Mr Madness.

In this concluding paragraph of Ecclesiastes Chapter 7, Solomon harks back to the record of his downfall step by step in his matrimonial adventures. I Kings 11:1-13 says:

"But king Solomon loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites; Of the nations concerning which the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods: Solomon clave unto these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines: and his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and went not fully after the LORD, as did David his father. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon. And likewise did he for all his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.

And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned from the LORD God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, And had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods: but he kept not that which the LORD commanded. Wherefore the LORD said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as

this is done of thee, and thou hast not kept my covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one tribe to thy son for David my servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake which I have chosen."

From his contact with his 700 wives and 300 concubines he concludes, "And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her" (Eccles 7:26). From Dr McIntire's observation, "Women can make life very cruel for their husbands, and they can prolong that cruelty in many unsuspected and devious ways." Fortunately, Solomon is elect of God. "It is of the LORD'S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lam 3:22). Solomon, by the gentle mercies of God and for David his father's sake, is not totally cut off.

From his many experiences with women he here speaks "the language of a penitent," says Matthew Henry, "warning others against the sins he had been betrayed into, and is not a mere satirist lashing indiscriminately half of the human race. Many a godly man can with thankfulness acknowledge that he has found a prudent, virtuous woman in the wife of his bosom. But those men who have gone in Solomon's track, cannot expect to find one. He now discovered more than ever of the general corruption of man's nature. He traces up all the streams of actual transgressions to the fountain. The source of all the folly and madness in the world, is in man's apostasy from God. It is clear that man is corrupted, and not as he was made. He sums up the whole of his observations on the state and conduct of man in this—God indeed created man upright, and very good. But Adam having apostatised from Him, his children have sought out an immense number of inventions, to find happiness in their state of rebellion. But these have only proved to be so many

changes of sin and iniquity, so that very few godly persons are to be found on earth. It is indeed most lamentable that man, whom God made upright, has found over so many inventions to render himself wicked and miserable.”

“A hero can hardly go through Beauty’s Gate” is what is observed by the Chinese sages.

ECCLESIASTES VIII

THE WISE MAN STANDS BEFORE HIS KING

Ecclesiastes 8:1-5

Who *is* as the wise *man*? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed. ² I *counsel thee* to keep the king's commandment, and *that* in regard of the oath of God. ³ Be not hasty to go out of his sight: stand not in an evil thing; for he doeth whatsoever pleaseth him. ⁴ Where the word of a king *is*, *there is* power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? ⁵ Whoso keepeth the commandment shall feel no evil thing: and a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment.

Solomon says, "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser" (Prov 9:9). Wisdom is the key to knowledge, so a wise man who is instructed further behaves wisely in every situation of life. He comes out triumphant, not as the fool with his foolish look.

A wise man is instructed to be careful in word and action when he stands before his king. He is bound by the oath of allegiance to his superior. He attends to his king faithfully and loyally. He keeps himself far from any wicked plot against the king, for the king has power to execute what he wills. The king has power over life or death and that power is irresistible.

Is Solomon speaking from his experience of carrying out the commands of his dying father David over his enemies which resulted in their executions? David's enemies despatched accordingly by

Solomon's wisdom and power were Joab, David's Commander-in-chief who treacherously murdered the two captains of Israel, Abner and Amasa; Shimei who cursed David in the day he was running from Absalom his son. And Solomon took care also of his personal enemies so that none of them could escape out of the king's hand.

Solomon was a temporal king who ruled with awe, how much more is God who is Judge over heaven and earth? Do not consort with those who plot against your superiors, for those who are so involved will not be unguilty. "Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation" (Rom 13:2).

A wise man who serves his sovereign loyally and faithfully has never a worry about his standing before him. He can see through what will happen, good or bad, at the end of the day.

NO MAN CAN RESIST THE APPROACH OF DEATH, MUCH LESS HAVE PRIOR KNOWLEDGE OF ITS COMING Ecclesiastes 8:6-8

⁶ Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man *is* great upon him. ⁷ For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? ⁸ *There is* no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither *hath he* power in the day of death: and *there is* no discharge in *that* war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.

Nothing happens by chance! Everything that happens in the world is predetermined, yea, "the misery of man is great upon him," (v.6). Earlier, Solomon says, "I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it" (3:10).

Some people (even Christians) would want to know their future, and if it be bad, to avoid it. I have known even an elder who consulted a fortune teller before he went to Indonesia to make

business, whether he could be successful. This is condemned by Deut 18:14, “For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto **observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do.**”

Fortune tellers and mediums, knowing the psychology of the common herd, use their arts to grip them by predicting the date of their death. This happened to Mr Chew Fook Wah, a respectable employee of Shell. He became a devout worshipper of many gods and idols. He was so steeped in idolatry that he converted the sitting hall of his house into a mini-temple.

When told by the medium he consulted that he would die by Chinese New Year’s night, he could not sleep for months. He sat up all night till the day after New Year, but death never came to visit him. This hoax opened his eyes.

When the Gospel was preached to him, he readily received Christ. From a blind idolater he became a devoted iconoclast. He burnt up his idols which cost him \$10,000. Soon after this he enrolled at Far Eastern Bible College to study to become a preacher. He was a Cantonese and the Cantonese were a very superstitious people. He burnt their idols by the score and through his effort a Chinese Church was established.

It was he, when he joined Far Eastern Bible College, who directed me to Eccles 8:6-8: “Because to every purpose there is time and judgment, therefore the misery of man is great upon him. For he knoweth not that which shall be: for who can tell him when it shall be? There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.”

I have used these verses of Scripture to deliver a towkay like Chew Fook Wah. This man turned his office also into a mini-temple. When the medium told him he would die by a certain day I read verse 8 to him. “There is no man that hath power over the spirit to

retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it.” He believed immediately and we proceeded to his office infested with scores of idols big and small. We brought one carload of these and had them all smashed up at Life Church. He was delivered from the medium and was baptised and joined our Church.

REWARD TO THE GOOD AND RETRIBUTION TO THE BAD

Ecclesiastes 8:9-17

⁹ All this have I seen, and applied my heart unto every work that is done under the sun: *there is* a time wherein one man ruleth over another to his own hurt. ¹⁰ And so I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of the holy, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done: this *is* also vanity. ¹¹ Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. ¹² Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his *days* be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: ¹³ But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.

¹⁴ There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just *men*, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked *men*, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous: I said that this also *is* vanity. ¹⁵ Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun. ¹⁶ When I applied mine heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done upon the earth: (for also *there is that* neither day nor night seeth sleep with his eyes:) ¹⁷ Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek *it* out, yet

he shall not find *it*; yea further; though a wise *man* think to know *it*, yet shall he not be able to find *it*.

Solomon applies his heart to study what others strive to do under the sun. He observes there is one who rules over another to his own hurt. In Chinese he is the *towkay* and his subordinate the coolie, but the latter serves the former often with a rebellious heart. The answer from my observation is, "It all depends." Confucius says those who govern must be living examples and those who rule must rule by virtue. This principle can be seen in the table of reigning kings of Judah and Israel. David, the king of kings, reigned 40 years but the wicked kings reigned at most two years, some 6 months and one only 7 days.

He observed that the wicked prospered and flourished in the abuse of their power, but death overtook them, and being buried, they were forgotten. They lived a life of vanity. He further observed that prosperity hardened their hearts to continue in their wickedness. But the end result of the wicked, though he escapes punishment a hundred times, is righteous retribution. Conversely, those who fear God and do good will be rewarded. As the Chinese saying goes, blessings come to those who work righteousness, but cursing to those who work wickedness. "But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow; because he feareth not before God" (v.13).

Only faith in God can establish the heart in this world of paradoxes where the righteous often suffer and the wicked prosper. This observation led Solomon to recommend the moderate use of earthly things, with cheerfulness and contentment. "Then I commended mirth, because a man hath no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry: for that shall abide with him of his labour the days of his life, which God giveth him under the sun" (Eccles 8:15). In the next chapter Solomon elaborates, "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife

whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun” (Eccles 9:7-9). This is the blessing of earth which God bestows on those who fear Him.

In regard to wine mentioned in the above paragraph it is not the red wine or white wine today that has a high alcoholic content of 13 to 17 per cent. According to my teacher Dr R L Harris, the wine that the Jews drank, even in Jesus’ time, had only 3 to 4 per cent of alcohol which preserved the grape juice. Moreover, when they drank this wine they would add water to it, as the custom was. Drinking such wine will never lead to intoxication.

Solomon then commended security and serenity of mind arising from confidence in God and His providence, because a man has no better thing under the sun than to thankfully use the things God has given him.

Man has to submit humbly to God in the mysterious works of His providence. It is impossible for us to know everything about God. Trusting in Him we bow to His wisdom, justice and goodness. And to believe and obey here will prepare for the world hereafter, where we shall know Him even as also we are known.

ECCLESIASTES IX

LIFE IS A PARADOX UNDER THE SUN

Ecclesiastes 9:1-10

For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, *are* in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred *by* all *that is* before them. ² All *things come* alike to all: *there is* one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as *is* the good, so *is* the sinner; *and* he that sweareth, as *he* that feareth an oath. ³ This *is* an evil among all *things* that are done under the sun, that *there is* one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness *is* in their heart while they live, and after that *they go* to the dead.

⁴ For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵ For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. ⁶ Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any *thing* that is done under the sun. ⁷ Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. ⁸ Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. ⁹ Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that *is* thy portion in *this* life, and in thy labour which thou

takest under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Solomon searched in his heart the mysteries of the paradox of life under the sun. One thing he was sure of was that the righteous, the wise and their works were under the special care of God. But what perplexes him, as it perplexes Jeremiah, is, why do the wicked also prosper (Jer 24:1)? And why, on the other hand do the righteous suffer? This is the paradox.

This is so because the world in which we live is under the power of sin. Fortunately, no event can come to pass except by the outworkings of God's providence. God is in control of everything, good or bad. God's ways are past finding out.

But there is one event in life that happens to every one without exception. Whether the righteous or the unrighteous, the clean or the unclean, those that sacrifice and those that sacrifice not, the good and the bad, he that forswears or he that fears an oath, yea, the hearts that are filled with evil and madness while they live — these all will have to die one day.

But God will certainly put a difference between the clean and unclean, the good and the bad in the next world, though He seems not to do so in this. The difference as to present happiness arises not from outward causes, but from the inward which the righteous enjoy, and through the lessons they learn from life's trials and difficulties.

The life of Joseph is a wonderful example. Sold to Egypt by his wicked brothers, he prospered in the house of Potiphar, for God was with him. When his fear of God kept him from sex with his master's wife, he was cast into prison by false accusation. But he found favour with the prison superintendent. When he interpreted, by the wisdom God gave him, the dreams of the baker and the butler, he was introduced by the butler to tell Pharaoh's dreams. He was promoted to Prime Minister.

Life is now no paradox when Romans 8:28 becomes the key to our lives. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” And things, both good and bad, work good to those who love God.

The righteous sacrifice worshipfully and the wicked sacrifice not. As far as the sons of men are left to themselves, their hearts are full of evil, and prosperity in sin cause them even to set God at defiance. They go on in their wickedness until they join those who perish before them in their sins. Though on this side of death the righteous and the wicked seem alike, there is a great difference on the other side. According to the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, one went up to paradise. The other went down to hell.

While life continues, there is hope. According to verse 4 we may hope for the conversion of the sinner. In this view the worst sinner’s state is better than the most noble who has died but is lost. This is what Solomon meant by a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living, knowing they shall die, has still a chance to repent. The dead, who did not repent in this life, has no second chance. They are lost in oblivion.

Solomon, having expounded on the result of the deeds of the wicked leading to their lost condition proceeds to exhort the righteous to enjoy the blessings of earth God has bestowed on them. What he says, he says vividly, “Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife (*not wives!*) whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity (*life is short*), which he hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity: for that is thy portion in this life, and in thy labour which thou takest under the sun” (vv. 7-9). (The importance of keeping a happy marital relationship cannot be over-emphasized for many couples appear all right outside but not inside.)

“Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (v.10).

Just as it is observed we have only one chance in this life to believe in Jesus and repent from our sins, so we have one chance to labour for God to return our love to Him. A Christian is saved to serve. We cannot return to God with empty hands. This that is required of us is clearly taught in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19) and in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25).

In the parable of the talents, the Lord commits to his three servants, one five talents, the second two talents and the third one talent to trade. The first two servants each gained double or 100%. They were highly commended. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” The third servant buried his talent in the earth and did nothing and was heavily reprimanded. Is that how we return to God for saving us, with empty hands? Are your giving to build the New Beulah House the leftovers as in your tipping?

Life under the sun is no more a paradox when we see God ruling and overruling in His works of providence, over a world of sin.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES, NO ONE, STRONG OR RICH, WISE OR SKILFUL, CAN ESCAPE

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12

¹¹ I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. ¹² For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so *are* the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.

Solomon says, “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the

wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.” What Solomon is emphasizing here is even the upper class of mankind suffer like the lower class because they cannot foresee the unforeseeable.

This happened to those who went to office at the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre where two planes manned by suicide bombers crashed into the 110-storey skyscrapers raining death on 6,000 of the unsuspect. This was on Sept 11, 2001. Two months and a day after this planned disaster, an American Airlines 300 Airbus carrying more than 250 was leaving New York City for Dominican Republic when it suddenly crashed, losing one of its engines, killing all on board, plus about 10 caught on the ground.

When such disasters occur, planned or unplanned, what is the answer? There is a Chinese saying, “natural disasters and man-made tribulation.” Whatever the disaster or tribulation, it cannot happen without the decree of God. God is in control of everything that happens in the world, big or small, the big events include the Twin Towers of the WTC and the plane crash two months thereafter also in New York, and the small event of the falling of a sparrow to the ground (Matt 10:29). To emphasise God’s care over us, His children, Jesus says, “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

But Solomon is speaking rather to those who are strong and mighty, not in God, but in themselves. To those who are outside Christ. To those who held high posts and good jobs at the Twin Towers of WTC. To the pilots and stewards and the holiday-makers in the American Airlines plane that crashed two months thereafter. Solomon’s sermon to us at this prayer meeting tonight is timely in case there are some well-to-do who are still outside Christ. Recently, I was asked by a devout daughter to speak to her aged father hospitalised for cancer operation. He had been attending the Chinese

Service for years, but he did not appear to his daughter to be a saved person. When queried by me he replied, “Jesus wants me to do good works in order to go to heaven.” When I asked him if he knew his sins were forgiven, he could not reply. He wanted to be saved but he could not say how. He could not even pray. When I led him in the sinner’s prayer he gladly repeated after me. His wife who stood by his sick bed also joined in. Thereafter, both husband and wife repeatedly uttered, “Lord Jesus, save me. Lord Jesus, save me.”

You may be rich and powerful, healthy and strong, but this cannot take you to heaven when death comes. But the born-again Christian is ready to go anytime to God.

WISDOM COMES FROM GOD: ONE WITH GOD IS MAJORITY

Ecclesiastes 9:13-18

¹³ This wisdom have I seen also under the sun, and it *seemed* great unto me: ¹⁴ *There was* a little city, and few men within it; and there came a great king against it, and besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it: ¹⁵ Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man. ¹⁶ Then said I, Wisdom *is* better than strength: nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom *is* despised, and his words are not heard. ¹⁷ The words of wise *men are* heard in quiet more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools. ¹⁸ Wisdom *is* better than weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good.

Wisdom that saves a little city or delivers a country from disaster comes from the Almighty. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (Jas 1:5).

Joseph was such a man. He lived closely with God and God gave him wisdom which delivered him from death. His great ordeal was the wife of Potiphar’s daily temptation to have sex with him, but he flatly refused. As a result he was cast into prison. There God further

prospered him. He revealed to him the secrets of the dreams of the baker and the butler. The baker was executed, the butler restored to the palace to serve Pharaoh.

Pharaoh had a double dream of seven thin cows eating seven fat cows and of seven thin ears eating seven fat ears on a stalk. He was greatly troubled and his magicians could not help him. But Joseph by God's wisdom solved Pharaoh's mystery. The two dreams are one. Egypt will have seven bumper years of harvest but these years of plenty will be swallowed by seven years of famine.

Pharaoh made Joseph prime minister because his God-given wisdom saved the nation and surrounding nations. What would Solomon say to this? He applauds this with Pharaoh, for he says, "And it seemed great unto me" (Eccles 9:13).

After Joseph and Pharaoh had gone from the scene the exploits of Joseph were forgotten. "Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph." Solomon says of the poor wise man, "Yet no man remembered that same poor man."

But Solomon the wisest of men remembered the poor wise man. Solomon praises wisdom to excel power and might. Solomon deplores that wisdom is easily forgotten. Wisdom is despised and totally submerged. But wisdom from God remains supreme. One with God is majority.

When power and might rules among fools, the words of wise men are silenced. Wisdom is heard when silence reigns supreme, as with the small and humble.

Solomon says, "Wisdom is better than guns and bombs," in today's language, for a sinner, one who despises wisdom, can lead a nation into disaster. Incidentally this happened in Rehoboam, Solomon's son. Rejecting the wise counsel of old men for that of young turks, he spoke roughly to the tribes of Israel who came to make him king. This resulted in their revolt under Jeroboam who became Israel's king. Only Judah and Benjamin remained with Rehoboam. It also shows how quickly Solomon the wisest man that

ever lived sank into oblivion after his death. What happens in politics happens also in the Church.

ECCLESIASTES X

OF WISDOM AND FOLLY

Ecclesiastes 10:1-10

Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: *so doth* a little folly him that is in reputation for wisdom *and* honour. ² A wise man's heart *is* at his right hand; but a fool's heart at his left. ³ Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth *him*, and he saith to every one *that* he *is* a fool.

⁴ If the spirit of the ruler rise up against thee, leave not thy place; for yielding pacifieth great offences. ⁵ There is an evil *which* I have seen under the sun, as an error *which* proceedeth from the ruler: ⁶ Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place. ⁷ I have seen servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth. ⁸ He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him. ⁹ Whoso removeth stones shall be hurt therewith; *and* he that cleaveth wood shall be endangered thereby. ¹⁰ If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom *is* profitable to direct.

Dead flies make the pharmacist's ointment to stink, so does a little indiscretion tarnish the name of a wise and honorable person. A man's reputation is his second life, says a Chinese proverb.

The Hebrews say, "A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart is at his left." A wise man has great advantage over a fool. He goes about his business with dexterity, but the fool fumbles around like a man that is left-handed.

Solomon continues to show us the path of discretion. If your superior has anything against you do not run away. Rather yield yourself to his good pleasure. In so doing he will be pacified.

Under the sun Solomon observes even a king's mistake. Consulting personal affections rather than public interest, men are not preferred according to their merit, "Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place." Thus servants are seen riding upon horses and princes walk as servants upon the earth.

He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it. He that digs a pit for another, it is ten to one but he falls into it himself.

Whoso breaks a hedge, an old hedge, that has long been a landmark, let him expect that a serpent such as harbour in rotten hedges, will bite him.

He that cleaves the wood, especially if he has sorry tools, shall be endangered thereby. The chips or his own ax head will fly in his face. If we meet with knotty pieces of timber, men of perverse and ungovernable spirits and we think to master them by force and violence, the attempt may turn to our own disadvantage.

OF FOOLISH TALK **Ecclesiastes 10:11-20**

¹¹ Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babblers is no better.

¹² The words of a wise man's mouth *are* gracious; but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself. ¹³ The beginning of the words of his mouth *is* foolishness: and the end of his talk *is* mischievous madness. ¹⁴ A fool also is full of words: a man cannot tell what shall be; and what shall be after him, who can tell him? ¹⁵ The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because he knoweth not how to go to the city.

¹⁶ Woe to thee, O land, when thy king *is* a child, and thy princes eat in the morning! ¹⁷ Blessed *art* thou, O land, when thy king *is* the son of nobles, and thy princes eat in due season,

for strength, and not for drunkenness! ¹⁸ By much slothfulness the building decayeth; and through idleness of the hands the house droppeth through. ¹⁹ A feast is made for laughter, and wine maketh merry: but money answereth all *things*. ²⁰ Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter.

There is a practice in the Orient of charming snakes by the power of music, see Ps 58:5, and rendering them harmless for a time. The babbler is a dangerous person capable of doing serious injury. His tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Like the snake he must be “charmed.” We must find the way to tame him. The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious but the lips of a fool will swallow up himself.

A babbler talks foolishness as soon as he opens his mouth. He ends his talk in mischievous madness. A fool also is garrulous. No one is able to tell what he will be and what will be after him. The labour of the foolish is to no purpose. He has no capacity to understand the plainest thing such as the entrance to a great city, and he misses the road. The way to the heavenly city, however, is a highway in which the wayfaring men though fools, shall not err (Isa 35:8). Yet sinful folly makes men miss the way.

Mutual duties of rulers and subjects

Solomon observes how much the happiness of a land depends upon the character of its rulers. The people cannot be happy when their princes are childish and voluptuous (v.16). The land is blessed with a king who is a son of nobles, and when the princes eat at proper times, for strength and not for drunkenness.

Of what ill consequence is slothfulness both to private and public affairs (v.18). It is the ruin of actions. A feast is made for laughter and wine for making merry. But money is most useful in every situation of life.

Curse not the king, not at all in thy thoughts and curse not the rich either in your bedchamber. Because God sees what men do and hear what they say in secret and when He pleases, brings it to light by strange and unsuspected ways. By way of application, curse not the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Your curses cannot injure Him, but His curse, coming down upon you, will sink you to the lowest hell.

ECCLESIASTES XI

SOW SPARINGLY, REAP SPARINGLY, SOW BOUNTIFULLY, REAP BOUNTIFULLY **Ecclesiastes 11:1-6**

Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. ² Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth. ³ If the clouds be full of rain, they empty *themselves* upon the earth: and if the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be. ⁴ He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. ⁵ As thou knowest not what *is* the way of the spirit, *nor* how the bones *do grow* in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. ⁶ In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both *shall be* alike good.

In the Orient, when the fields are flooded, they plant their rice. That is like casting bread on the waters to feed fish. Here is a lesson from sowing. If we sow sparingly we reap sparingly. If we sow bountifully we reap bountifully. Giving in fact is receiving. It reaps bountiful returns.

We observe from nature how rain clouds irrigate the fields. Trees grow old, they die and lay down facing the north or the south. So we also die, one this way and the other another way. We must consider

our end. Will we die happily in Christ? Or fearfully with little hope of salvation?

Life must go on regardless of any conditions. A farmer must keep at his work rain or shine. Go on and persevere in well doing! Let slip no opportunity. If we persevere in due time we will reap (Gal 6:9). “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good” (Eccles 11:5-6).

**ENJOY YOURSELF WHEN YOU ARE YOUNG,
BUT WHEN OLD AGE COMES, AND DEATH,
GOD WILL BRING YOU INTO JUDGMENT**
Ecclesiastes 11:7-10

⁷ Truly the light *is* sweet, and a pleasant *thing it is* for the eyes to behold the sun: ⁸ But if a man live many years, *and* rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many. All that cometh *is* vanity. ⁹ Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these *things* God will bring thee into judgment. ¹⁰ Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth *are* vanity.

A Jewish teacher whose husband had a lucrative job in Singapore found an equally well paying job teaching Modern Hebrew for Far Eastern Bible College. When she and her husband were leaving Singapore to return to Israel, they came to say good-bye. I asked them their philosophy of life. They said earning a good living and spending on happiness was life. The time when old age and sickness come and finally death, that was it. They are atheists. They know not there is God’s judgment.

After WWII when Singapore was rehabilitated by the British and I returned to my job as Chinese Interpreter in the law courts, I was invited to hear a lecture by the newly appointed British High Commissioner for S.E. Asia. He was a charming orator and he spoke on his philosophy of life. At the age of 55 he was at the prime of life. He challenged us young people to study hard and obtain a good career. Then enjoy yourselves for soon old age comes. He expected to live up to eighty-five. That's all. He was shown on the cover of a magazine holding hands with two semi-nude Dyak girls, smiling broadly.

I remember Mr Malcolm MacDonald more deeply when I took a cargo boat to USA 1947 to study at Faith Seminary. Travelling on the same boat back to Canada via New York was Mrs MacDonald, silent and forlorn. I felt her sadness.

A godless life is not only a life that finally breaks up on earth, but one that must face God's judgment in the next. Thus Solomon ends Ecclesiastes chapter 11 with this warning that leads us to chapter 12, the conclusion on his many observations of the vanity of life, a godless life under the sun.

ECCLESIASTES XII

A DESCRIPTION OF OLD AGE, TO ENFORCE THE EXHORTATION TO A GODLY LIFE

Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; ² While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain: ³ In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened, ⁴ And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low; ⁵ Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is high*, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: ⁶ Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. ⁷ Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

When we see the realities of old age we should remember the ever-living God our Creator. We should recall our sins in repentance and pray for forgiveness. We should remember our duties, seeking His strength to perform them for His glory. This should be done from

our youth while we have the energy, and not when we are old and say, "I have no pleasure in them."

The description of old age is done by Solomon in Jewish metaphors. Verse 2 refers to the succession of pain and infirmities which attend to old age. They are like torrents of rain after the sunshine.

The keepers of the house, v.3, are the hands and arms which start to tremble. The strong men are the knees and legs which bend and totter with age. The grinders are the teeth, which cease, because they are few. Those that look out of windows are the eyes which are now darkened, become blind. The lips refer to the doors of a house. The aged, being weary of couches on which they find no rest, arise as soon as the birds start singing in the morning. All the organs employed to produce or enjoy music shall be brought low. They cannot bring delight. The old man is insensible to the charms of melody because of deafness. Being subject to doubts and alarms, v.5, being conscious of the decay of their powers, the aged consider the least undertaking as hazardous and difficult. The almond tree is a picture of the hoary head. The grasshopper, another metaphor of the old man, shall be a burden to himself. Finally comes his funeral.

As the four preceding verses are a figurative description of the infirmities that usually accompany old age, so verse 6 notices the circumstances attending dissolution. Before the silver cord or spinal marrow be loosed and the golden bowl be broken, the head ceases its function, and the pitcher or heart be shortened and the wheels or lungs broken at the cistern, then shall our human frame be dissolved. The spirit shall return to God.

The infirmities of age teach us the evil of sin. If sin had not entered the world these infirmities would not have been known. But God will be with the believer. God will give him patience to endure his pains and infirmities and in his good time relieve him from the burden of the flesh. Happy are those who encounter the unnumbered

infirmities and troubling of old age in full assurance that Jesus loved them and gave Himself for them.

A REPETITION OF THE TRUTH THAT LIFE UNDER THE SUN IS TOTAL VANITY, AND WARNING OF THE JUDGMENT TO COME

Ecclesiastes 12:8-14

⁸ Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all *is* vanity. ⁹ And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, *and* set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and *that which* was written was upright, *even* words of truth. ¹¹ The words of the wise *are* as goads, and as nails fastened *by* the masters of assemblies, *which* are given from one shepherd. ¹² And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books *there is* no end; and much study *is* a weariness of the flesh.

¹³ Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. ¹⁴ For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.

Solomon went through life with the privilege and power of a king. With every facility under his control he delved into every subject.

In chapter 2 Solomon said,

As I pondered in my heart, I decided to explore into the realms of pleasurable enjoyments. I found it all emptiness. And what is laughter? It is nothing but being out of my mind! And what is mirth or merrymaking?

I tried wine-drinking with self control and I studied the foolishness of men and what they should do “under the heaven” and throughout their lifetime.

I engaged in structural engineering, in horticulture, in botanical gardens and fruit orchards of all kinds. By constructing reservoirs around them, I irrigate all my plants.

I owned servants, male and female, who also begat children and I owned cattle, big and small, more than all others who had them in Jerusalem.

I amassed great stocks of silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and from the provinces. I formed choirs of male and female singers with the accompaniment of various musical instruments.

In all these pursuits I become the No. 1 in Jerusalem over those that were before me. I was the wise monarch of all I surveyed. I indulged in all that I could see and entered in the joys of my pursuits.

When I surveyed all the foregoing works, leaving nothing out, you see, all that I have done amounts to nothing because they were done “under the sun.”

As a wise teacher Solomon has wisely taught those who heard him, using the language that they speak, the doctrine of truth. The words of wisdom he imparts are stimulating and quickening as goads to sluggish oxen and like nails are deeply infixed in the heart. The publication of the words of Solomon is the making known of a sacred record inspired by the Lord God Himself.

Of the making of books on the subject of this discourse there is no end and much study of human composition is a weariness of the flesh — under the sun! The conclusion of the whole matter is “*Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*”

This wisdom of Solomon is reflected in Romans 2:7-16 “⁷ To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: ⁸ But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, ⁹ Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of

man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; ¹⁰ But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: ¹¹ For there is no respect of persons with God. ¹² For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; ¹³ (For not the hearers of the law *are* just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. ¹⁴ For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: ¹⁵ Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) ¹⁶ In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.”



LIFE is a deep well of mysteries. Hence Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived, is challenged to delve into these mysteries. Under the sun, he found them a vanity of vanities. Life lived above the sun is God's answer to man.

The answers to Solomon's studies on the many aspects of life are rightly called "Lessons from the University of Life". The conclusive answer in the concluding chapter brings us to the conclusion of the whole matter – *"Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."* (Eccl. 12:13,14).

This book is highly evangelistic, against the atheism and agnosticism of yesterday or today. And Christ the Son of God who died for our sins and rose again from the dead is the only answer.

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