

"WHO KNOWETH WHAT IS GOOD FOR MAN IN THIS LIFE"

Ecc. 6:12

INTRODUCTION:

The question for us today is that which suggests how little we know of the earthly life. And how little we can know while we are in the flesh. The text reads -- <sup>///</sup>Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life. All the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow. "

I read a few years ago of a young man who had sued the University that he had attended for four years. Because as he stated in his suit - "they did not teach me wisdom." The suit was declared invalid - in his charges the student said, he was led to expect much from the University. And during his four years that he had been there - he had learned neither truth, understanding, integrity, justice, courage, honesty, nor critical judgement. The University, in reply said, that it did not doubt the fact of the charges as indicated. And went on to add - "Wisdom is not a subject that can be taught." And that the University never came to teach it.

It is easy for a man to have much knowledge and not be wise. Solomon indicates in his lesson here - that there is something beyond knowledge. And that something is what he calls wisdom.

Now the thought that we can really know so little in the earthly life - so long as we are in the flesh, we shall be able just to touch the realm of knowledge.

Paul put it this way -- now we see through a glass darkly. Or through a

blurred glass. Mysteries confront us on every side. We cannot sound their depths or scale their heights. Ignorance is always at every turn.

Therefore, we should not give range to foolish talk or speech. But in these recent years, we find conditions that are abnormal everywhere. We find a flood of foolish writing, on subjects - and we find a flood tide of foolish religion.

Job teaches us wisely at this point. When every earthly prop seemed to have been taken away from that grand old man, he turned to God and would not deflect from God. When his children, not simply one but all, were taken from Job. The old man of faith said - "the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." Later, when not only children were taken, and every piece of his property was taken. And his friends who forsook him, and his own wife came to him and said - "curse God and die." Job simply said, "let come on me what will. Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." Job teaches us the proper way to behave in the perplexing situations of earthly life.

President Theodore Woolsey of Yale was something like Job. All five of his children died of a dread disease, within a few hours. The great educator layed them to rest. And, quoted from Psalm 38 the words - which later he had placed on the gravestone marker. "I was dumb. I opened not my mouth because thou Lord didst it."

In 1865, Lincoln was assassinated - the great patient, mighty man - and

In 1865, thousands gathered in the streets.  
excited throng of thousands gathered in the streets.



were going too and fro like sheep without a shepherd. They were overcome by the questions of that hour. There was a statement made by a man at that time - "God reigns and the government in Washington still lives." The crowd quieted down because the right word had been said - God reigns. God loves and pities and cares. And all of the foolish talk was over.

Now the text that we have here in the book of Ecc. asks a question - who knows what is good for a man in this life. All the days of his vain life which he spendth as a shadow.

As I have pondered this text, and this entire chapter, I have thought about the chapter with what is common with all men. And he weaves the matchless story here and winds it up with this question.

Now I think the text summarizes the chapter in two things. What do we know about life. And second, what we do not know about life. Let us now look at these two propositions.

## I. WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT LIFE

What is it that you and I know about life.

First, he says for one thing, life is very brief. Its brevity is something that causes us to stand at attention - very, very brief. If one of you here before me should live to be as old as Methuselah - 969 years. Yet, you would come to that last year very quickly.

You can talk to an individual - as I was talking to a man the other day who was about 93. And his comment in effect was, that the earthly life was so brief. Now, of course, think about his life. He has been married 60 years. But he says, the earthly life is so brief. He knows that it was just like the other day, he was on his mother's lap. And now he has great grandchildren. But it seems that life has gone like an arrow.

We know that earthly life is painfully brief. How quickly does Christmas come. You know, you think as a child - Christmas will never get here. But then it is here and then it is gone. Thanksgiving season, Birthdays, Birthdays come and Anniversaries come and they pass. And Solomon in our text says that your earthly life is compared to a shadow. Who knowth what is good for a man in his life. All the days of his vain life which is spent as a shadow.

Well, you all know how uncertain that a shadow is. Here you are - standing in the sunshine in a shadow. And then in an instant - a cloud passes over, and that shadow is dissolved and is gone.

James asked this question one time - what is your life. Earthly life. And then he answered it - it is even as a vapor. That appeareth for a little time and then vanishes away. Now the Bible has figures and symbols that suggest the brevity and the frailty and uncertainty of earthly life.

In the Psalms we read, grass growth up in the morning. But in the evening, of that very same day, it is cut down and whitereth - comparing it to the earthly life. In another place, the Psalmist compares life to a swift ship at sea. You

have been down and stood on the beech. And watched a mighty ship plowing through the great waters of the ocean. And lo, you look, and it passes beyond your vision and is soon gone. The earthly life is compared to that.

It is compared to the breath of one's mouth.

It is compared to the flight of the eagle. While you look at that proud bird, he lifts himself higher and higher, until in a moment, he is lost upward in flight.

Death is the one certain thing. Oh, the uncertainties of life. More uncertain is life than the spider web across our window. While we sleep. Yet, it is hard for us to get this truth in our hearts.

Charles Dickens, in his way, tells us of a lawyer - who was constantly declaring that every man should make his will. The lawyer was correct - every man should make his will. But Dickens said, the same lawyer died "without making his own will."

Most men think of life only in terms of today. If we would only pause to think of how brief and how uncertain earthly life is - then we would know, a great truth. What do we know about life.

For one thing, the earthly life (does not satisfy.) We rise up early, we toil late at night, we gain things at great pains and patience, and sometimes at great



cost. And when we have gained them = they do not satisfy.

Take wealth, for example - when men have gained it. It does not really give peace to their restless spirits. It does not satisfy. One of the richest men in the world once said when he was interviewed and asked about his state of mind - he said, I would give all of my fortune for the stomach of my chauffeur-as nothing I eat - morning, noon, or night gives me any pleasure. But rather causes me pain.

A leading college man in America, tells about a boyhood friend - a chum of his. He tells that that friend of his, came a multi-millionaire. And he said to him, the only thing in print in all of the world, that interests me at all - is the column that has the stock market reports. Well, how critically poor that man is.

We know that fame is equally something that does not satisfy. Men rise up early and toil late. Thus for the glory of fame. How sad it is and how unsatisfactory it is to win a crown that just fades away.

Men also have found that earthly pleasures do not satisfy - they become worn out in spirit, they are troubled, and they are disquieted. The sense of loss and defeat becomes theirs.

Not even knowledge then has the power to satisfy. A man may study and study, and weary the flesh - as Kipling, when he was in this country for the last time - he was ill. He was far from home. And the great sea was between him and his loved

ones. They carried him to the hospital - and one of the nurses heard him sob, in the night - over and over again. I want, I want. She bent over and said - what is it that you want Mr. Kipling. And he said, "I want Christ, I want Christ, nothing can suffice me now but Christ."

A very prominent man was heard to say when he was close to the gates of death, I am at the place now where only Christ can suffice me. And I want Christ. Nothing on earth can satisfy.

Since that is so, what are we to do. Just what the Lord tells us to do. We are to come with unfaltering submission to him. And to offer our souls, that he might become our Saviour. Our Master, our Pilot, our guide, our helper today - tomorrow and forever for those who covet him.

Therefore man goes on looking for security for life. A young couple starts off - they must have this and the other. There is an article, some years back, in a publication - entitled - "How To Go Broke On \$10000." Well, a lot of people think that they would like to try that. But we know that, what many people provided for an adequate retirement program, some years ago - is totally inadequate today. No matter how much a person may have - he never seems to have enough. One person has said, "There is too much month left over at the end of the money."

But we human beings, we are just like a child going to sleep, clutching his favorite toy rabbit or doll - and we as adults fish around for a lucky coin or rabbit's foot. Therefore, there are many things that we know about life. And many of these things do not satisfy.



II. WHAT WE MUST - OR WHAT WE DO NOT KNOW ABOUT LIFE

So we look at this in another direction. There are some things that we know about life that do not satisfy. What are the things that we do not know about life as Solomon suggest here - there is much about life that you and I (can never know)

For one thing, who knows which is better for a man. (Wealth or poverty.) Now if you could debate that in your mind - do you know. Most of these have perils. But who knows.

Where wealth may often become arrogant, or pride, or self-sufficient. It may even harden a man's heart and cause him to shrivel up. Now the Bible says that the love of money is the root of every kind of evil. And Jesus said how hard it is for a man to have riches and enter into the kingdom of Heaven. And he explains in the next sentence that they are paralyzed in the fact that a man is prone to put his trust in his riches. That is why it is so hard for that kind of man to enter the kingdom.

Consider poverty likewise, has its perils. You may call to mind pictures of painful poverty. Here is a woman with the burdens of poverty which stabs her heart. She is a frail woman without enough to eat or wear. And the pains of poverty are hers.

Prov. 30:8-9, is perhaps a good prayer for all of us. (Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food sufficient for me. Lest I be full and deny Thee, and say, who is the Lord. Or lest I be poor, and steal and take the name of my God in vain.) So the question is - who knows what is best, for a man. To increase his riches or to increase his poverty. Is that man nearer to true happiness because



his abundance. Or is a man truly happy and successful because he has all of the pleasures. When it comes to balancing the payments, nothing that will do him any good are turned to a penny.

That we do not know to wish for even. We promise ourselves most satisfaction. And some of these things often turn out to be vexing to the soul. And vanity. We covet things that will prove a calamity for us. We are apt to desire that which is good - thought it may be hurtful.

Did you ever see a little child cry for a knife. Now, a sharp butcher knife will cut his fingers and we know that that is not good for him. But in life, we use the same kind reasoning.

Who knows which is better for us - health or sickness. Now each of these have compensations. Who knows which is better. Do you have health today? Then I want to say to you - go on your way and take care of it! How rich is the earthly life in health. We can work early and we can work late for humanity. We can use these hands, brain, heart, and mind and put them on the altar for God and human service. How great is health.

Now, think about sickness - it may have some remarkable compensations. In the Psalms we read, "it was good for me that I was afflicted." He learned about God as never before. One of the finest men in this country said one time - "I had to go blind in order to see Christ." I was foolish, selfish, and self-sufficient until my sight was taken. And in the dark, I looked for Christ. And I saw him and found him.

And my heart rests upon him without any fear.

3 - Who knows which is better - to be prominent or to live in obscurity? Now, a man is foolish to struggle just to be important. The advice that I would give is - if ever some recognition comes to you - let it come very naturally. If some comes - let it come in the response as to the method of Jesus. "He that would be great among you - let him be servant of all." Now that is something that some men will rise up early and toil without any regard for anyone else. And then, there are other men who will rise early and late, and seek to help humanity. And they are not seeking rewards, things, or importance. And they will leave the results with God. What is there in that.

What about obscurity - some of the greatest heroes that men has known have been men and women who have not been recognized beyond their neighborhood. Or maybe in their family life. They have been patient, truthful, honest, noble, good, and loyal - and they have given their lives to a Christian home and to the neighborhood in which they live.

There was a, some years ago, a prominent Negro in the world - Bishop Scott of Algeria. There was an older Negro porter who worked on the pullman cars in the East. And one day, that man was pointed out to a friend - and he said, I want you to see this porter as he comes along the aisle. There is a story about him. That white-haired porter is over 80 years old. And had a remarkably fine face. And the conductor said to this friend, his brother is a wonderful man - the great Bishop Scott of Algeria. He said, our porter here, was the oldest child in the family. And when he came to young manhood, he had a notion that he wanted to preach. He wanted to preach the Gospel. His father died, and left his mother with



a houseful of young children. And he had to give his life to support the family. He educated all of the young children. And one of the brothers, whom he educated, became the Bishop of Algeria. He said, you know, this old Negro said to me the other day, maybe when I come to the gate above - the Master will say, there is a place here for you. Then he said, very quietly, how little I have done for God in the world.

But the friend who was listening said - you are mistaken. He will be a great partner and a full-pledged worker right beside his brother, the Bishop of Algeria.

Now, who knows whether it is better. To be (prominent) or to be (obscure).

Who know whether it is better to sail a quiet sea, than to be the midst of the vile storms. Paul, the Apostle, said that he has given me a thorn in the flesh. And three times, I besought the Lord to take it away. But the Lord did not remove it. Instead, he said - Paul, I will give you more grace than ever since you have the thorn. No more account have we of Paul asking for his thorn to be taken away. But we find him most gladly carrying on and saying - that God had given him added grace to bear the situations in life.

Who knoweth what is good for man in life. What do we know about life. It is pretty uncertain. And secondly, what we do not know about life. What is best for you. Well, how knows what is best for you. Since we know so little, and much less ever know so little in the flesh - there is one wise thing that we can all do. We can commit ourselves trustfully to him who is the light of the world. The Saviour



of this universe.

I want to close with this story. During the days of World War II, the late King George VI of England, did visit a famous pottery plant. He was shown the plates as they were ready for the kiln. The plate was still pliable - the King picked it up and examined it. And put it down again. And when the King left, the owner rushed to the department, took the plate, and said - we will take care of this plate. The finger prints of the King are on it. We will place it in the kiln and then it will go down the ages as the plate that bears the marks of King George VI, of England, passed by and touched a common ordinary plate and made it a thing of lasting value.

Now something like that happened to a human life when Jesus touches it. Common men, as Solomon was talking about, can never be common place again once they are touched by Jesus. For they have been touched by the King of Kings, and the Lord of Lords.

We can know the (reality of Jesus' touch) - every Christian knows that feeling. Some of us today here, need to have the touch become a little firmer, and a little firmer. We might get a little closer to it. That which is touched by the King is never common place again. The life that is touched by Christ is never the same. He is held in the Master's hand and he is kept there through eternal security. And that is the only real security and real life that we have knowledge of. Have you done that. If so, then rejoice forever more. Now if you have not done so, if you have held back from giving your life to him who died for you. Who blessed you with every blessing from the largest to the least. Have you held back your life,

from submission to the great Saviour and Lord. Give him that submission before it is too late. Surrender to him now.

The best possible thing that any human being can do in this life is to make complete surrender unto Christ - the all sufficient Saviour. Our expectations from this world are as uncertain and deceitful as our enjoyments are. Since everything is vanity - who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun - Solomon said.