



## *Ecclesiastes 6: 3-6*

### *Accepting our Lot under the Sun*

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Text: Ecclesiastes 6: 3-6.

Reading: Ecclesiastes 5: 8- 6:12.

Singing:

Psalm 107: 1, 12.

Hymn 42: 3, 4, 5

Psalm 128: 1, 2, 3.

Hymn 65: 1.

Hymn 65: 2, 3.

#### **Theme and points:**

*The LORD teaches us that we are to accept our lot under the sun. This means:*

- 1) not in resignation to life's bitterness, but*
- 2) in appreciation of life's blessedness.*

## *Ecclesiastes 6: 3–6*

### *Accepting our Lot under the Sun*

*A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he. It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded. Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man—even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place?*

As we move along in the book of Ecclesiastes, we find that certain themes are repeated, but from a slightly different vantage point. The present text speaks about enjoying prosperity.

In chapter 4 the Preacher also spoke about enjoyment, but that was more a matter of enjoying one's *work*, while in the chapters 5 and 6 it is more a matter of enjoying one's *prosperity*. Evidently the emphasis here is on having riches and wealth but not being able to enjoy them.

Many people tend to think that those who are rich have no problems in life, always enjoy life, and therefore are to be greatly envied. But that is not true. Those who are rich are not always able to enjoy their riches and be content and happy. The more money you have, perhaps, the more you worry about it. The more you have, the more you need and crave. In 5: 10, the Preacher says, "...whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income..." One never has enough.

It is extremely hard to be truly satisfied with one's lot in life See 5: 19: "Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God."

#### **Do you enjoy life?**

Have you accepted your lot? Are you happy in your work, and do you enjoy life? In chapter 6 we learn that we may have all kinds of things, wealth, possessions, and honor, but if we cannot *enjoy* them, it is a grievous

evil. And all this lies under the tension of the fact that we all must die and leave everything behind. Naked we come and naked we go. When we leave this life, we leave as we came, with empty hands. How sad it would be, then, if in the meantime we had so much but did not, or could not, enjoy it. I summarize it as follows:

*The LORD teaches us that we are to accept our lot in this life under the sun. This means:*

- 1) *not in resignation to life's bitterness, but*
- 2) *in appreciation of life's blessedness.*

The element of accepting our lot comes to the fore throughout the section which we read, and very specifically in 5: 18: "Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him- for this is his lot." Note the last five words.

In chapter 2 the Preacher says, "This is from the hand of the LORD". Now he uses the expression: "this is his lot". In 5: 19 we even read that it is a gift of God when someone can *accept* his lot. We have a certain "lot" and we must accept it. What is meant by this word "lot"?

### **A measured portion**

Perhaps in our language, the word "lot" can be rather neutral, like some destiny of unknown origin, a destiny for which there is no rhyme or reason. Things just happen the way they do; that is someone's lot. But in the Hebrew this word is not neutral at all. A "lot" is a portion measured off and given to someone by God. The NKJV has the word "heritage." The KJV has "portion". Whatever translation you choose here, and the word "lot" is perhaps the best in this line of thought, it is a God-ordained lot. Things do not happen to us by chance, but are carefully "measured out" to us from God's hand.

This is a very important piece of wisdom. Since our lot is measured out to us by God in his wisdom and from his hand, what are we to do with it? Of course, we must accept it. But all acceptance is not the same. You can accept something because you *have* to, and then it is a form of acquiescence or even resignation. I can resign myself to reality, but that does not mean that I really come to accept it as from God's hand.

Sometimes it is true that you cannot work with your lot or come to grips with reality. Then, no matter what you have, you cannot enjoy life. That is probably the biggest waste of all: to have a life and not enjoy it. You live your life here under the sun only once. How sad and deeply tragic it is when you then cannot enjoy life.

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## ***Cause for enjoyment?***

In our text the Preacher mentions some things that ought to be a cause for great enjoyment. A man may have a hundred children. I wondered for a moment how you can enjoy one hundred children. We have enough work dealing with five or six or ten. How do you handle one hundred children? You will probably need more than one wife.

It is a high number, even for Old Testament times. Gideon had seventy sons, but it is added that he had many wives. Add a good smattering of concubines, and the number of children can increase very quickly. But a hundred is a high number, even for Old Testament times, as I said.

It is meant here in terms of a great blessing. Having many children was seen as a special blessing from the Lord. Psalm 128 speaks about this blessing. The children God allows are a rich reward, a blessing great and fitting, for him who fears the LORD. So in terms of having children the man in our text has been richly blessed by the LORD.

## ***A long life?***

And he lives “many years”. He has a long life. 6: elaborates on the possibility of “a thousand years twice over”, and that must be 2000 years. The current Queen of England (Elizabeth II) has reigned for fifty years, and she is called the longest reigning monarch in the world. What a celebration they made of it in the United Kingdom at her fiftieth anniversary as queen, but can you imagine two thousand years? This is more than anyone has received.

Do you remember how old Methuselah became? He is the man with the longest life recorded in the Bible. He lived 969 years, and then he died. Almost a thousand, and of this man here in Ecclesiastes it is said, what if he lives 2000 years? This hypothetical man has more children than anyone ever had and he lives more years than anyone ever will. So you would call him greatly blessed, would you not?

Yet now it comes: “but he cannot enjoy his prosperity”. In 6:2 it says that God does not *enable* him to enjoy wealth, possession, and honor. He has all a person could ever want, but he does not enjoy any of it. He is not enabled to enjoy. In that case, he may as well be dead or never have been born. What sense is there to life, to having anything at all, if you cannot *enjoy* it?

## **Lack of enjoyment**

The Preacher calls this “another evil” under the sun and he states that it “weighs heavily” upon men (6: 1). It seems to me that this sad condition of not enjoying life is more common than we might think. Many people, in every way rich and privileged, simply do not enjoy their prosperity.

Now the text does not give us the reason for this lack of enjoyment. Perhaps there is more fun in pursuing something than in actually having it. Some are only happy when they are acquiring, but they cannot stop to enjoy what they have acquired.

In 6:5 the Preacher uses the word “rest”. I will get back to the context of that in a moment, but the word “rest” is important in itself. You need time and rest to enjoy something. You have to unwind. But some never receive this “rest”. They never find the time or opportunity to enjoy what they have been given.

So many people are *bitter*. It may be that some people with the greatest blessings are the most bitter. You just cannot have *everything* your way. So the “lot” is not accepted. People resign themselves to life’s bitterness and become bitter themselves in the process. All they have or do means nothing or little, for they are bitter, angry, and dissatisfied.

## **Angry and bitter people**

When the Preacher writes that this evil weighs heavily on men, it seems to me that he has observed this mentality everywhere and abundantly. It is a dead weight found everywhere. There are so many bitter and angry people who have blessings coming out of their ears, but have no eye for God’s grace and goodness. They may eventually resign themselves to the facts, but it robs them of their enjoyment, their joy in God even. Count them out.

The Preacher adds the words, “and does not receive proper burial.” What does a burial have to do with it? Who cares about a proper burial? Some people dare to say, “Just lay me down somewhere, and fill the hole.” You can be so disgusted with life that a proper burial does not matter anymore.

## **A proper burial**

The matter of a proper burial has to do with the fact that the Preacher mentions a stillborn child. A proper burial would be the fitting conclusion to a long and happy life. Then there can be a memorable eulogy. But a stillborn child has no name, no life, no achievements to mention, and no bur-

ial. Nowadays, a burial is often referred to as a “celebration of [someone’s] life”. How can you properly bury someone who has had no life to speak of? What is there to celebrate?

I refer you here to the fact that the Jews wanted Jesus’ body to be dumped somewhere in an unknown spot, perhaps a general burial place where common criminals were abandoned in the wilderness and where the remains would never be identified. There would be no eulogy and no marker, but only an unknown grave for a despised man (cf. Isaiah 53: 9).

Does it really matter how or where you are buried? In this case you have a man who never enjoyed life, who died in bitterness against God and his fellow men, and who did not even have a proper burial. The Preacher states that if that’s how you live and die, you may as well not live at all.

### ***A stillborn child***

The Preacher is fully aware that he is making a strong statement. That is why he adds, “I say”. See those two words? If that is how someone is going to live and die, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he!

Look at the description of a stillborn child. “It comes without meaning, it departs in darkness, and in darkness its name is shrouded.” It never lives under the sun. Its life is of no significance. It did nothing, its name means nothing, and will not be remembered for anything. But was it useless? Not at all. Notice the next words: “It has more rest than has that man”

Back to the word “rest”. Whatever life this stillborn child had is safe with God. It may be disposed of in this world, but it has a place with God. A stillborn child is better off than an embittered old man. It was spared many of life’s evils and trials, and goes straight from the darkness of the womb to the brilliance of heaven.

### ***The soul of a child***

For we should not think that a stillborn child has no soul. This is something to note when we discuss the pros and cons of stem-cell research. The Preacher says, “Do not all go to the same place?” That stillborn child and that grumpy old man will both one day come to stand before the only true God. And if we then, having had great prosperity and length of days, have not enjoyed any of it, what will the LORD say? What does the LORD of life say to those who have despised their own lives? What do you think God says to those who have lived in bitter resignation and not *in appreciation* of God’s blessings?

For that is to be our prevailing attitude in life as God’s children. Count your blessings. Enjoy them as a child of God. Let no bitter root take

hold anywhere within you (cf. Hebrews 12:15). Do not presume to know more than God and to decide for yourself what is good.

Take a look ahead to 6:12, “Who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow?” I am like a shadow passing. Even 2000 years is in God’s sight as two days. How can I know what is good for me? Shall I dictate to the LORD what I need and how I shall live? Or shall I learn to live in appreciation of his blessings in this life?

That is, then, the bottom line. If we do not appreciate what we have in this life, the stillborn child will one day rise up against us. Abortionists, beware of your victims for they shall rise up against you. The stillborn will say, “I never had a life, but you had a good one and did not appreciate it. How dare you come before God with this?” Do not all go to the same place?

### ***Did you appreciate your blessings?***

I think it counts double for us. Compared to many others, we live in great wealth. Our lives have been greatly blessed, and this continues every day. We are a free and prosperous people. There are here many children and many elderly, and we have a diverse and blessed congregation. Do we appreciate it?

Forget the stillborn child now for a moment. What about the only-begotten Son of God? Shall He rise up and say, “Why did you not appreciate your blessings?” He had nothing. He had no possessions, no home, no bank account, no retirement savings plan, and He died in bitter shame on a cross. But bitterness was far from him. He was thankful for every blessing and for every morsel of bread. He lived under the sun in great appreciation of God’s blessings. His heart was pure, even when the sun was darkened. And in him we have all we need for this life and the life to come.

Let us for his sake and in his strength not become resigned to the bitterness of life. Much is bitter, I know, but let us live in great appreciation for God’s undeserved and abundant blessings in Christ our Lord, who from our mother’s arms has blessed us on our way. Morning by morning new mercies I see. Great is his faithfulness.

AMEN.