

**July 12**

**Scriptures:** Read Ecclesiastes 4, 5 & 6

**Key Verse:** “Walk prudently when you go to the house of God, and draw near to hear...”  
(Ecclesiastes 5:1)

## **Overview**

Solomon expresses his disappointment and disgust at the prevalence of wickedness and oppression in the world. That one man would unmercifully and cruelly oppress another made him no better than a beast (3:18). Solomon concludes that it is better to never be born than to have life and see the evil on the earth. Included in this evil is greed and covetousness among neighbours, which is futile (vanity). Solomon confesses that working diligently to gain money is necessary, for the one who does not work will starve; yet, too much hard work in order to amass riches causes troubles and stress, so this too is vanity. Having contentment and peace of mind with just a little money is better than having a lot with worry and stress (4:5-6).

The individual who selfishly amasses wealth can turn into a miser who often withdraws from contact with other people so he will not have to share his profits with anyone. Such a person is in a pathetic and futile situation, for his covetousness has deprived him of one of the greatest joys that life offers — family and friends. Solomon lists some disadvantages of being alone by explaining the advantages of having a companion. With a friendly business partner, the profits can be greater even though they must be shared. With a companion, one has help when he falls. In the cold night, one has the warmth of another beside him, as well as the benefits of protection and security (4:8-12).

The one who has a companion is fortunate, but the one who remains alone lives in misery. Two other types of people are contrasted by Solomon: the “poor and wise youth” with “an old and foolish king”. The youth is considered wiser, because he hears the reproof and admonitions of others. The king, however, has become so hardened and self-sufficient because of his riches that he will no longer listen to counsel. Such a king becomes self-centered and forgets about serving others. Although he came out of a background of poverty (“prison”) and was a popular king, with time he forgot the plight of the poor and no longer tried to help them, thus he became unpopular. His rise to power and popularity was therefore vain and empty (4:13-16).

The importance of one’s relationship with God is stressed by Solomon in chapter five. A true worshipper must come before God with the utmost respect and enter His House reverently, for it is Holy Ground. He must also have the sincere intent to hear and be obedient to the Lord. He is not to be a hypocrite by merely acting religiously in offering sacrifices when his heart is unrepentant, for this is a sin and an abomination to the Lord (5:1). Nor is anyone to make rash vows or nonsensical prayers to the Lord that are mere words and vain repetitions (Matt. 6:7). A vow to God that is not honoured could bring the judgment of God upon the foolish person. Solomon’s stern admonition is to fear the Lord (5:7). Our prayers and promises to God must be done with the deepest reverence.

From the remainder of chapter five and continuing in chapter six, the preacher illustrates the vanity of riches and of life in general. One should not marvel at the oppression of the poor and the perversion of justice in the world, since this is a natural result of man's sinfulness and greed which is evident in the governmental system (5:8). Those who love money will never be satisfied with it, even if it increases to abundance (5:10). In fact, too much money can bring harm: worry and anxiety causes one to not sleep well; there is the risk of misfortune in losing it all; and upon death he can take nothing, so all his labour to attain riches has been in vain (5:12-17).

Those who have the proper attitude toward riches (without selfishness and greed) and those whom God has blessed are the only ones able to enjoy their riches and their life, since for these people their life, heritage, wealth, and strength are gifts from God, and God has blessed them with enough joys of life that the difficulties of life seem insignificant (5:18-20). If one is unable to enjoy one's wealth and family, however, it is vanity and like an "evil affliction" which produces much misery (6:1-2). For such a person, it is better to have not been born. Those who find satisfaction and contentment with what they have, even if it is little, are far better off than those who are rich but can never find satisfaction and fulfillment (6:9). What is the key to being satisfied and finding enjoyment in life? It is without a doubt the spiritual satisfaction of the soul (6:7) and in yielding of oneself to the will of God, for only God knows what is truly best for mankind, and His best was provided through His Son, Jesus.

## **Prayer**

Dear Lord, thank You for the great joy we have in life when we keep You on the throne of our heart. Help us to learn, as did the Apostle Paul, the secret of contentment no matter what our situation.