

## Contentment in a Discontented World- Ecclesiastes 6 – (29 March 15)

Allow me to direct your attention to the book of Ecclesiastes and chapter 6. Today we continue our look in the book of Ecclesiastes, about life under the sun. Last week after service, one gentleman came up to me and asked me, “Pastor, have you heard of Catch-22?” I said, “Yes, I’ve had...I’ve heard about it.” “Do you know the author of the book – Catch-22?” I said, “No, tell me more.” He said his name is Joe Heller or to be more precise, Joseph Heller. And he said this author, Joseph Heller was once invited to a billionaire’s house and the host that day, the friend that day said to him, “Do you know that this billionaire earns in one day, more than what you could ever earn with your book – Catch-22 in your whole lifetime? What does that do to you, Joseph?” He thought that Joseph would be very jealous and very upset, but Joseph says, “I...I don't feel anything.” He says, “Why not?” “Because I have something the billionaire doesn't have.” Say what is it? “I have enough.” That was a very insightful statement. I have something he doesn't have. I have enough.

Very few people today enjoy life as it is, because they always feel “I don't have enough!” Solomon in chapter 5, and in tail-end, verses 18 to 20 is saying: “Enjoy your lot; this is what God has given to you.” So instead of lusting and coveting over things that you don't have, enjoy what God has given you today. And Solomon knows that this is not easy for us to accept. It is not easy for us to believe, because deep in us, there's this belief that if I just have more; if I have that; if I can attain to this, I will then be happy.

We always think the grass is greener on the other side. And that is so easily stoke up in us when we watch an advertisement about a brand-new car or when we hear from our neighbour, he has just moved into that condo or maybe when we are comparing ourselves with our neighbour besides us. It's so easy for us to think, it's truly greener on the other side. So Solomon here is going to continue to dispel these myths and delusions so that we may really find true meaning in life under the sun. So he's going to tell us about contentment in a very discontented world.

By the way, this is such an important thing because many people are afflicted with the disease of discontentment. Do you know why people are stressed and miserable today? A lot of it is because of discontentment, the drive, the compulsion to say, “I must have more.” That's why they rack up huge credit card debts because I must have more, and that's why they give up on their wives; they give up on their husband because I'm not happy with what I have today. I want more. I want something...someone prettier; I want someone smarter; I want someone more capable; I want someone...it's...it's always more and right now I can't really be thankful.

So Solomon is going to tackle a very needful subject. It's what the Puritans sometimes call, the rare jewel of Christian contentment. So how can we get there? How are we going to arrive at this state? Well, let's listen to Solomon. He says in verse 1, "There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind." (Ecclesiastes 6:1 ESV)

"What is this evil?" you say. Well, it's not easy. I'll say right from the word 'go', Chapter 6 is extremely...trying. I...I...I had such a headache trying to figure out what it is really, when I first looked at it. I was lying on my bed, I asked my wife to read it and to share with me what she thinks and she said to me: "Good luck to you!" Hahaha... (Pastor Laughing) (Laughter in the congregation) when she read it.

Well, what is this evil? I believe, having studied this text, if you look at the context in chapter 5, verses 18 to 20 and then you look at the end of chapter 6, it is speaking about this reality: instead of craving for more, be thankful for what you have, because God has put it in your life. And in the middle, in between these 2 passages, is the whole discourse of how discontentment is so futile. So this grievous evil which lies heavy on mankind, is that thinking: that if only I have more...I will be happy and it is a delusion.

So Solomon is saying, the delusion of: "If only I have..." is something you have to be very careful about. If only I have more money; if only I have that car; if only I have that house or if only I would get my promotion or if I would have finally...children, I'll be happy or if only I have a longer life, then I'll find satisfaction here. So this is the lie. This is the grievous evil, to place your hopes in a future attainment and he's going to tell you why this is not wise. He starts by saying, let's suppose someone who longs for money and possessions and honour, he believes that if he gets that, he will be happy. Does it really work? Solomon now reasons, "... a man to whom God gives wealth, possessions and honour, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires..." We think he will be happy. "But not really," Solomon says. It is not guaranteed. It is not foolproof because what if God does not give him power to enjoy them, and a stranger gets to enjoy them instead? This is vanity; it is a grievous evil. (Ecclesiastes 6:2 ESV)

So Solomon says, "Yah, he might get all that thing, but what if he now get sick or what if he dies or what if he becomes mentally unsound? That theory, that dream, that belief that if I have more, I'll be happy does not work anymore, does it?" It's no guarantee. It's a grievous evil to believe this. 6:39.2

This is a picture of Howard Hughes, one of the richest man in America in his time. You might have heard of him from the movie, "The Aviator". He owns planes; he earns a lot of money; he has many companies under him; he lives the high life. But, in the latter stages of his life, he's far from happy. It is said that he stays in the top most rooms of hotels which he owns,

but he shuts off the windows, draws all the curtains or blinds everything out to total darkness. He has gone, in a sense insane, in that he doesn't cut his hair, it goes to his waist; he doesn't cut his beard; he doesn't trim his nails, they are long like animal-like; he sleeps naked because he thinks everything is dirty and he's always watching for germs; he slimmed down, he really thin out; he got himself on drugs and died tragically alone in a dark, dingy hotel room that way.

So there are people who say, "I want to be like Howard Hughes." But God did not give him the power to enjoy and it is such a lie to believe, "If I have more...I will be happy." So Solomon says, "This is vanity and it is a grievous evil." But what about other things? You say, "Alright, I may not choose wealth, possessions and honour. What about other things?" Well, there are other things mentioned here. Two things more, in particular, one is a long life – longevity; the other one is posterity - many children.

And so Solomon says, "If a man fathers a hundred children..." That's a lot of children ah! "...and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many..." (Ecclesiastes 6:3 ESV) So Solomon now says, "Alright, you want more children; you want longer life. Okay, let's say, you may get it." You say, how many years is many years? In verse 6, he says, "Even though he should live a thousand years twice over..." (Ecclesiastes 6:6 ESV) So he's going to live two thousand years. Of course, this is...this is hyperbolic; this is exaggerated speech. The oldest man ever to walk on this earth, or the longest living man ever to walk on this earth is....? Anybody knows? (Response in the congregation) Methuselah. And he lived 969 years. So that is the oldest and he's saying this man lives two thousand years, so this is of course exaggerated speech.

Solomon says, "Alright, let me give you a scenario. This man, he finally gets to live long; in fact he lives very long. He finally gets to have children and he has many of them, possibly to take care of his death and funeral. Okay, he has all these." Is satisfaction and meaning in life guaranteed therefore? He says, "No, because his soul may not be satisfied." So what if you live long? You may not be satisfied with life's good things and so what if you have many children, they don't give you a proper burial. 没有人给你送终 (mei you ren ge ni song zhong) (Mandarin words meaning nobody to send you off in your death) You have many of them, but they don't care about you. They insult you by not doing anything for you in your death. "What's the point?" he says.

So Solomon says, "This man is a tragic case that even a stillborn child is better off than he." In other words, he says, "Having lived this kind of a life - long life; many children, it's worse than someone who has never seen life." That person who has never seen life is not subjected to the same frustration and disappointment, emptiness that this man has faced. So that

delusion, that belief: “If only I have...I'll be happy” is quickly dispelled by Solomon that says, “There is no guarantee.” It is dangerous; it is wrong; it is foolish to have your life fuel by discontentment. 10:46.1

Now, this passage is very appropriate for Chinese. I'm a Chinese, as you can see. Many of you here are Chinese and the Chinese's thinking is, I think, mirrored here, very similar to the Jewish thinking. The Jews look after wealth and...and look for longevity and for posterity. What about Chinese? Also right? Chinese we value 福如东海 (fu ru dong hai). The next one? (Response in the congregation) 寿比南山 (shou bi nan shan). The next one? (No response) Wah...Chinese...hello? (Laughter in the congregation) Lau Kui! (Hokkien dialect meaning lose face) Many children means...? (Response in the congregation) Very good lah! 儿孙满堂 (er sun man tang) 或 子孙满堂 (zi sun man tang). Now for those non-Chinese, it means fortune like the eastern sea; longevity like the southern mountains; children and grandchildren filling the hall. That's what it means. Same things that are spoken of in Ecclesiastes 6. These things that the Chinese, we say will make us successful, make what life is all about. Solomon says, “If only I have these things, I'll be happy is not a guaranteed thing.”

There is a delusion. A delusion is something false that you believe in. He's saying this discontentment is a delusion. This feeling that I must have more, so that, then I will be happy - it's a lie; it's a mirage. Don't trust it! So he goes on to say, “All the toil of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied. For what advantage has the wise man over the fool? And what does the poor man have who knows how to conduct himself before the living?” (Ecclesiastes 6:7-8 ESV) This, in the context of discontentment is saying, why do you even allow discontentment to fulfil or to fuel your life, to drive your life? To say that: the more I work, the more I have, and the more satisfied I will be. Solomon says, “It will never work; it will never satisfy you. Even in the pursuit of wisdom, even in the pursuit of right behaviour, right living, even if you have more of these things and you're not satisfied where you are today, it will not give you greater satisfaction.”

There's a story told of a... I'm sure you might have heard this story already... of a wealthy man who walked by the river and he saw a fisherman just lying and not going out to fish. He asked the fisherman, “Why are you sleeping here? Why don't you go out to fish?” The fisherman says to him, “Well, Sir, I have just done my fishing. I've caught enough fish.” He says, “Then why don't you go more? You have the boat, you have everything, you have the whole day, go get more.” He says, “Why?” “So that you can earn more money.” He says, “Why?” “So that you can buy more boats and buy more equipment to fish more.” He says, “Why?” “So that you have more money.” “Then why?” “So that you can enjoy.” The fisherman then said to the man, “What do you think I am doing now?” 13:54.0

Sometimes, we are just caught up with this belief that: the more I have, the happier I'll be and we failed to rejoice and be thankful for the present. And so Solomon is saying, "Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite..." (Ecclesiastes 6:9 ESV) Better to be contented with what God has given you than to believe the delusion of discontentment. This is vanity. This is a grievous evil. This is what man living life under the sun is under slavery in. This belief in the delusion of discontentment: "If only I have...I'll be happy."

Solomon now helps us, he clarifies the delusion and now he shows us the deliverance. How can I be saved from this discontentment? If discontentment says, "If only I have...I'll be happy." Contentment says, "Because God has given...I am happy." Notice the difference: if only I have versus God has given.

The key to Christian contentment is, of course, God Himself. Because of God, I can be content. And this is seen in verse 10. "Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is, and that he is not able to dispute with one stronger than he." (Ecclesiastes 6:10 ESV) Solomon here is saying, "Hey, you can be this: you can be contented. You don't have to strive and to lust and to covet for more, because you can trust that God is sovereign. He has already given; He has already ordained and plan your circumstance way before you; it is determined. And He does this with full knowledge of who you are and what you need. There's nothing He doesn't know about you; His knowledge about you is perfect." And you know what? You cannot dispute with him; there's no way you can argue with him. There's no way you can say, "Oh, I wish I had this, that will make me happier." God says, no, no, no, there's no way you can dispute or win that dispute, to be more exact. 16:09.4

CS Lewis says, "To argue with God is to argue with the very power that makes it possible to argue at all." Actually if you think about it, it is very foolish for men to want to argue with God. And in the words of Apostle Paul, it's even stronger: "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?'" (Romans 9:20 ESV) So Solomon says, "Why do you think that if you have more, you will be happy? God is sovereign. He knows you, so why argue with Him?"

He then asked two questions: "For who knows what is good for man while he lives a few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow?" You want to argue with God? All right, let me just ask you two questions: you really think that what He has given to you today, is not sufficient for your joy, and you need more? Then can you answer this for me? Who knows what is good for you? Do you even know what is good for you? And do you know what will be after you? What can come next? Can you predict the future? Of course not!

A story is told of a man who saw this beautiful girl, and prayed, "God, if I could just hook up with her. If she could just be my girlfriend, I'll be the happiest man alive." And he hooked up with her and after a few months, the man then prayed to God again, "Lord, if I could just get rid of this girlfriend, I'll be the happiest man alive." (Laughter in the congregation) We don't know what is best for us. And here we are saying, "God, I must have this to be happy." God says, "I know what is needed for you, trust me." Who is man to argue with God?

"So what is contentment?" you say. Contentment is not worrying about what the future holds, but knowing who holds the future. I...I thought it is something I felt with the passing of Mr. Lee, this time. He has not been a Prime Minister for a long time, he has not been the one in power but some...somehow, in his passing, there is that...that uncertainty about the future of Singapore. Now we have a Prime Minister. We actually do not know who is the next one coming up and you don't see anyone clearly in the horizon and you start to worry about the future but I'm reminded today, who holds the future is far more important than what the future holds. God is in control. I don't have to worry, neither do I have to lust and covet. Contentment is rooted in this confidence in God.

Another person puts it this way: Contentment is realising you are better off the way you are right now because it is God's will. Now, this is very hard for you to believe because instinctively you say, "No lah! Not true. How can it be true? If God just give me one more million dollars, I'll be happy. Even happier, if everything remains the same, give me one more million, God, and I will be better off." Isn't that how you think? Isn't that how we think? One more million will do. Not always the best, you know? Not always the best. 19:43.0

It is not a problem for God to give you one million dollar more, no issue. You want 1 billion for Him to give you, no problem too. So why doesn't He give all of us a million or a billion more? A light-hearted example: a man loves gold. This particular man loves gold. He wants gold and amazingly one day, he received a huge inheritance - lots of money, lots of gold. So he spent a lot of money now to redecorate his house. Everything now has to be gold. He has golden floor, golden taps. His bed sheets turned yellow. I mean, changed to yellow colour. Curtains are yellow, painted yellow, everything in gold. And then one day, he got a liver disease and the liver disease gives him Jaundice. Jaundice means you become yellow too. (Laughter in the congregation) And he died from his liver disease, because when his doctor came, he could not find him. He is lost in all that yellow. (Laughter in the congregation).

God doesn't give us all that wealth because you know what? You may be lost in all that wealth. You may be lost there. You may not know how to handle it. It is well said that Christians - 95% of Christians could possibly pass the test of persecution; but 95% of Christians would fail the test of prosperity. So we are better off, we believe that because God

is sovereign, He knows me, He's wise, I am better off the way I am right now because it is God's will for me, right now. Key: God's will.

“Contentment is that sweet...” this is from a Puritan, someone long time ago, and he says, “Contentment is that sweet inward quiet, that gracious frame of spirit which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition.” That peace, that satisfaction that says, “Hey! God is good. I've all that I need for happiness. I don't have to dream or lust or covet after the next million.” I don't have to say, “God give me 10 more years.” If God says that I will die now, I'll be happy. Because He's wise and He loves me; He's my father.

Contentment is realising that God has already provided everything we need for our greatest happiness. This is very difficult to believe, I can tell you that. But this is what it is. The Bible tells us, be contented and it means He has already given me everything, for my greatest happiness. So in short, in my own version of understanding contentment, it is simply: confidence in God. What is contentment? It is confidence in God.

Do you know what's the first sin in this world? No confidence in God, isn't it? Adam and Eve were told by God: “You have this entire garden; you have this entire world; you can have everything you want to eat - all the fruits.” And I'm pretty sure in those days they have durians too. Durians without thorns; durians that is not ‘Jui Jui’ (Hokkien dialect meaning food that is watery) or ‘Cha Cha’ (Hokkien dialect meaning food that is hard), you know not the watery or too hard type; it's the perfect texture, the creamy one. And eh...it's sweet and bitter and you eat already won't gain weight type. (Laughter in the congregation). It's the perfect durian. He had all of that. Adam and Eve had the best of the best. But Adam and Eve were not contented. They did not believe that God has provided everything for their greatest happiness. There is one thing they want; there is one thing that they say, “If only I could have that, I will be happy.” That is a delusion; that is a lie that Satan gave to them and they believed it. And that ruin humanity. 23:59.1

It's the same problem with the Israelites. After being led out of Egypt, they said, “Aiya, God is so bad! He should have given us the garlic and the onions and the leeks back in the nation.” “Oh, it's so terrible! We're out here and we're in the hot sun and there's no water to drink!” “Oh, it's so boring! We're eating manna everyday!” “God doesn't love us. We are happier back there. Oh Moses, why did you lead us out?” Discontentment - no confidence in the wise and fatherly disposal of God, in giving us everything we need for our greatest happiness.

Tullian Tchividjian says, “Beneath every sin...beneath every sin is the failure to believe everything I need, I already possess in Christ. That's what's at the bottom of discontentment,

our failure to believe that everything we need, we already possess in Jesus Christ.” Do you believe that today?

Why do you watch pornography? Because you believe you will not be happy if you don't have that. Why do you slog your life away to get a higher status in your job and get more money? Because you believe if you don't do that, you're not going to be happy in life. Now there's nothing wrong with working hard, I'm going to clarify that later on. Christians must work hard, but it must not be motivated with the thinking that I must have more, in order to be happy. It's very hard to believe, but it is at the heart and the root of every sin. No confidence in my God.

Confidence in God is vital. George Bernard Shaw says, “There are two tragedies in life: one is not to get your heart's desire. The other is to get it.” Adam and Eve, you really want to eat that fruit, of the knowledge of good and evil? You want to do your heart's desire? Alright, go do it and it results in the great tragedy of life. You really want to eat flesh and not just manna? Alright, you eat it. And the quails came, it was so bad they were...they were engorged with it. Do you really want to follow your heart's plan? Do you really think you know better than God? Do you really want to play the role of little gods in your own life? Then you go ahead and you may end up in tragedy. When you decide to control your life and pursue discontentment, then this is what will happen to you. You lose the greatest happiness God wants for you right now, in you. 27:08.9

Contentment is confidence in God and I want to end by quickly clarifying this question: “Pastor, with all these sermons you are preaching, it seems to me that you are telling us to be a people with no ambition.” Chill lah! ‘Relak!’ (Malay word or Singlish way of saying: relax) Why so stress? No need to fight for more. Just ‘relak’ lah! You know there's a language in Singapore – ‘Relak’ lah! ‘Relak’ bro! ‘Relak’ brother! Okay, is it that Christians are to be people with no ambition?

Question: Are we to be contented? What is the difference between contentment and being complacent? The Bible teaches contentment, but it sure sounds a lot like being complacent. Where's the difference? How do I tell them apart? Remember the statements of definitions earlier? One key thing that kept popping up is: God's will. Contentment is to be happy in God's will. Complacent is to be ‘relaxed’...is to be relaxed or to be laid back, outside God's will. 28:27.8

Illustration is this: there is a frog in the well. The frog in the well - is it complacent or is it contented? The frog in the well - is it complacent or is it contented? (No response in the congregation) Wah, very ‘chim’ (Hokkien dialect meaning deep) philosophy (laughter in the



congregation). I tell you what I think it is. The frog is contented if it is God's will for it to remain in the well; the frog is complacent if God's will for him is to get out of the well. You get that? In my job today, am I complacent or am I contented? It is contentment if it is God's will for you to stay in that job. It is complacent if God wants you to do something more and you don't do it.

Christians are not to be complacent people. We are always to be living in God's will. That's the key. And if God's will is for you to suffer at the bottom of the well, sometimes you say I'm contented. Now, I did mention that Christians are to work hard, but let me say this: your working hard should not be fuelled by the lust for more. That's the key. Of course there's a difference between working in order to have enough, to support yourself and your family, that's fair. But when it is the lust for more, the greed for more, then it will be dangerous. It is... it is discontentment fuelling your actions and your life, and that will be out of God's will.

I say, Christians you work hard, not because of the lust for more, but you work hard because it is Jesus who placed you there. It is God's will for you to do your best wherever you are. So Christian should be the hardest worker, but for an entirely different reason. The world may work very hard so that they can get more; the Christian works hard because of Jesus Christ. He has placed you there. So it's an entirely different orientation altogether.

And I say to you, for the Christian growth for spiritual life, there is never a time you can sit and 'relax', okay? Because God's will for all of us spiritually, is to be like Jesus. God's will for us, for that frog is to always get out of this well, now it takes...we'll never get out of this well in our lifetime but it is His will for you to climb and climb and climb and climb all the time, because Christ's likeness is His goal for you.

So someone mentions it this way: we're never to be contented with who we are, but we are to be contented with what we have. Who we are in Jesus, we should never rest on our laurels, we should pursue Christ's likeness. But what we have today, I can be contented. I work hard, I try my best to provide for my family, but I can be contented, because God has provided me everything I need for my greatest happiness. I hope that clarifies for you. I don't want a church that believes that life is all about getting more, but neither do I want a church to imagine that we're all to be chill and 'relax' brothers in our companies. No!

Now, let me end with this final thing about confidence or contentment and it is this: contentment is confidence in God because of Jesus Christ. This is key. The world cannot have confidence in God. Why? How do you know if really God is for you? The Bible tells us we are His enemies. How do you know He is always working good for you? You don't have that promise. The promise is given to those who love God, isn't it? God will work all things

together for good to them that love God; he didn't say He will work all things good for those who continue to reject him. So our confidence in God is because of Jesus and the Bible says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Romans 8:32 ESV) So my confidence that: God is always for me, therefore I can be contented, is because God spared not His Son, Jesus Christ. He sent Jesus to die for my sins, to give His life up for me and if I see that at the cross, I can be confident and I can be contented. This God, who spared not His Son, gave me His best, how will He not also with Jesus, freely give me all things? 33:23.3

I end with just one slide - one statement I think that captures the entire sermon, I...I feel, and it is this: "I spent most of my life searching for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Then I finally found it at the foot of the cross." It's always over the rainbow. This life I'm living sucks, rotten life, no good life, I wish I had more. I must go through, I must go...I must climb and ride the rainbow because at the end of the rainbow, there is a pot of gold. That's what I live for. If only I have... I'll be happy.

Scripture tells us, today where you are, God has given you everything for your happiness. Why? Look at the cross, stay there, ponder the love of your Saviour for you. How will God not freely give you all things? My friends, this is a tough message to swallow. I understand. Because if you just watch another advertisement, you hear from your friend, you meet up with them - with what they have and what you do not have, you say, "I need more." But today, turn your eyes unto Jesus, He who gave His life for you will make sure you have all that you need for your happiness. He does. Let's bow for a word of prayer together.

There's a sweet joy that flows from the cross of Calvary. That confidence - that even in the toughest of times that God is for me and God is working out all things for my joy. It is a heavenly source of joy; not earthly. It is something profound and deep in our heart and not something superficial and visible to the human eye. But the saints of old and in the church history, countless people have experienced 'tis so sweet to trust in Jesus.

Maybe God has put you in a very difficult situation today. He wants you to learn to trust Him. He wants you to have confidence in Him. He wants you to be stripped of all these false idols and dependences in your life, so that you may know that at His right hand, there are pleasures forevermore. Rejoice in the Lord and then again, I say rejoice.

Would you be confident in God today in your financial situation? Would you be confident in God in your marriage situation? Would you be confident in God today in your childless situation? It's not that you don't do anything about it. By all means, if you feel, if you are led of the Lord to say, I need to look for a spouse; I need to have children; this is what I believe is

God's will for me. Do...do whatever you need. But at the very same time, let it not be fuelled by distrust and greed and lust. But having that sweet inner peace, He has given me everything and He will continue to provide for my needs. And the reason is a very simple one: He has given me Jesus Christ, isn't it? He has given me His Son.

My dear friends, if you're here today and you do not know Jesus, there is no guarantee that life works out well for you. In fact, I can guarantee you if you end your life without knowing Jesus Christ, it's going to be a tragic eternity for you. Because that's the price we have to pay for sinning and rebelling against the holy and infinite God. The Good News of the Bible however, is that whilst you are alive, He has given you an opportunity to turn from sin and to believe in Jesus Christ, His Son. His Son, whom He has sent specifically to die and to save you from your sin, Today, would you turn from sin and believe in Jesus Christ?

Father, we thank you for this morning. To turn our eyes to You and to be reminded that in this life, we need not put confidences in things, or objects or even people. But our confidence is in the Lord. We thank you for the guarantee we have at the cross. There are no guarantees in longevity or in materials, but there is guarantee in the cross of Jesus Christ and to the cross we cling. So may You direct our hearts to You and may we trust You every step of the way. Comfort hearts today, help us make right resolutions this day and may You draw many to be closer with your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You, we pray all this now in Jesus' name, Amen.