

Chapter summary – Where is your focus? James and John’s, the Sons of Zebedee focus was to set at the prime seats (to the right and left), of Jesus place of authority. Jesus said that their focus needed to be on becoming a slave to all. Peter was told by Christ that He, Christ must die. Peter said, “No way!” Christ said, “Get thee behind me Satan.” Peter was way out of focus. The crowds shouted “Hosanna,” when Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem. Their focus was on Christ, in the hopes that He would overthrow the government, feed, cloth and heal them. When they found Christ’s focus very different than theirs, they shouted, “Crucify Him.”

Because these individuals focuses were on the wrong things, they missed God’s intended blessing. Not only that, but their lives became even harder than they already were. Their lives became much harder than they needed to be as a result of their broken dreams and thus disillusionment.

The Teacher now sums up his observations. He reveals to us that because we live in a sin cursed world, everything and everyone around us is unstable and thus unpredictable. One day our possessions or our relationships may be a blessing to us and the next day they may be a detriment. Thus, we cannot look for lasting peace for our souls and meaning for our lives in them. It has to come from elsewhere if it is to be found at all.

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III. In Solomon’s search for an answer to his question, he reflects upon his observations, (Ch. 3:1-6:12)

5. SOLOMON ADDRESSES MAN’S MISUNDERSTANDING THAT HE KNOWS WHAT IS BEST FOR HIMSELF AND CAN CONTROL HIS DESTINY, (6:1-12)

1) Our world is sin cursed and the consequences of that weigh heavily upon the entire human race, (6:1-9)

 **INTERPRETATION:**

¹ **There is an evil** (a depressing, greivious, sickening state of affairs), **which I have seen under the sun** (i.e., for all who live in this sin cursed world filled with instability), **and it is common among** (lit., “it is great or heavy upon”), **men**, (i.e., this evil weighs heavily upon the entire human race as they are all under this curse—not just on unbelievers living by and for themselves):

(1) The instability and potential hardship of money, possessions and influence, (2)

² (Solomon gives us some examples of the evil that weighs so heavily upon the human race), **A man to whom God has given**

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riches and wealth and honor (money, possessions

and power), **so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires** (he has it all, he has arrived! He focused on these things and he finally has them in his grasp! He senses a great feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment in his soul); **yet** (even though God allows him the opportunity and/or ability to acquire these things), **God does not give him power to eat of it** (God does not overrule the natural and unpredictable consequences of the sin cursed world and thus guarantee him the satisfaction of enjoying them [e.g., wealth, retirement, a spouse, a child, job, etc.]), **but** (instead, sometimes), **a foreigner** (a stranger who did not amass the individual's wealth), **consumes it**, (ends up with the satisfaction of enjoying it). **This** (being given riches, power and honor, but not the ability to enjoy them), **is vanity** (empty, valueless), **and** (more than that), **it is an evil affliction**, (a depressing, grievous, sickening state of affairs that affects each and every one of us—and it is not because God is being cruel to us).

(2) The instability and potential hardship of children and long life, (3-6)

- ³ **If a man begets** (even), **a hundred children and lives** (the coveted), **many years, so that the days of his years are many** (to possess many children and a long life is viewed as a special blessing of God by the Hebrews—[e.g., 100 children and a Zillion dollars]), **but** (even so), **his soul** (his innermost self), **is not satisfied with goodness** (meaning, he is not guaranteed the power to enjoy his children or to be enjoyed by them, nor is he guaranteed the power to look back on his long life with joy and satisfaction—i.e., seeing his desires for his children and long life wonderfully fulfilled), **or indeed he has no** (guarantee of even an honorable), **burial** (he may be unhonored, unappreciated at death—for the Hebrew not to have an honorable burial was one of the greatest disgraces), **I say that** (then, in light of this uncertainty and potential agony), **a stillborn child is better than he**—(who lives in such instability and suffers such agony. Because, even though a stillborn has no honorable burial either, he is still better off than the one who lived a long life yet dies with so much personal agony gained through the years and so little regard or affection from others in the end of that journey. No one can hurt you like your spouse, but after that your children can cause you your greatest pain).
- ⁴ **for it** (the stillborn child), **comes** (arrives), **in vanity** (i.e., its conception and shortlived development is filled with futility being born lifeless), **and departs in darkness** (with no or little notice of him from the world at large), **and its name** (its individuality or mark upon this world), **is covered with darkness**, (forgotten, covered in vagueness).
- ⁵ **Though it** (the stillborn), **has not seen the sun** (the light of a single day), **or known anything** (about life period), **this**

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(stillborn still), **has more rest** (quietness within his soul), **than that man** (who even though may be blessed with much in the areas of children, riches, wealth, prestige, and a long life, but whose soul is far from being at peace)

⁶ (the stillborn is better off), **even if he** (the one who has much), **lives a thousand years twice**, (lives to be 2,000 years old, or sees 704,000 sunrises)—**but has not seen** (experienced), **goodness** (meaning all that he would hope to enjoy out of his labors, family and life). **Do not all go to one place**, (the grave anyways? Those whose souls are quiet, peaceful as well as those whose souls are filled with anguish through broken dreams? So isn't the stillborn better off. Do you have any dreams that have been damaged or even shattered)?

(3) The instability and potential hardship of ones work, (7)

⁷ **All the labor of man is for his mouth** (there is some purpose and profit in it), **and yet the soul is not satisfied**, (by such temporal and material things because God tells us, "*Man shall not live by bread alone,*" [Mat. 4:4a] It meets a need of the body, but it falls short of the needs of the soul).

(4) The instability and potential hardship of the wise and the fool, (8a)

^{8a} **For what more** (or what advantage, in respect to having a restless soul), **has the wise man than the fool?** (None, in the respect that both of them carry deep personal pain and multiple broken dreams.)

(5) The instability and potential hardship of the frugal man, (8b)

^{8b} (To take it another step), **What** (carrying on the idea of advantage), **does the poor man have** (or gain), **who** (even), **knows how to walk before the living**, (who knows how to get along in the world—who knows how to survive—who knows how to invest his time best in order to gain the most out of his opportunities—is street wise we say today? Even this person has no advantage if his soul is not rich and at peace. He too, suffers from broken dreams and disillusionment.)

(6) The instability and potential hardship of trying to be content with what you have, (9)

⁹ **Better is the sight of the eyes** (it is obviously better practically speaking, to be content with what you have—with what you can see and touch), **than the wandering of desire**, (than always wanting and bemoaning what you don't have—yet even so). **This**

also is vanity (empty), **and grasping for the wind** (even if you are content with what you have, if you think those temporal and material things are going to quiet your restless soul, you will find that they cannot any more than you can grab ahold of the wind. Being content with what you have won't even fix your broken dreams or take away your disillusionment).

2) [Now we see a shift from examples, to the fact that]
Our world is sin cursed and the consequences of that, man being the cause of the curse, the creature has no grounds to complain to our Creator about our broken dreams, pain and disillusionment, (10)

¹⁰ **Whatever one is** (which we know is human), **he has been named already**, (we are of Adam, meaning “*of the earth*”), **for it is known that he is man** (of the earth); **And he** (the created), **cannot contend** (meaning act as judge, set in judgment), **with Him who is mightier than he**, (“*indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?”*” God says in Romans 9:20. We have no grounds for arguing with God about how our lot in life has fallen. We are forever the clay and God is forever the potter.)

3) [Fact #2] **Our world is sin cursed and the consequences of that is everything and everyone around us has the potential to bring sorrow or joy to our soul, (11)**

¹¹ **Since there are many things** (like riches, wealth, honor, children, longlife, etc.), **that** (on a human level, that exists under the sun), **increase vanity** (their presence and increase potentially increases our emptiness and agony increases our broken dreams and disillusionment), **How is man the better** (when his life is all said and done for having them)?

4) [Fact #3] **Our world is sin cursed and the consequences of that is there is no way for us to know what is best for us personally, (12a)**

^{12a} **For who knows what is** (really), **good for man in life** (where everything that is temporal and material [from the most meanial and most coveted alike], is so unstable and potentially hurtful to us?!), **all the days of his vain** (transitory, unpredictable, potentially painful and empty), **life which he passes like a shadow**, (he is here today, and gone tomorrow—no different than the grass)?

5) [Fact #4] **Our world is sin cursed and the consequence of that is there is no way for us to instruct those who will come after us as to what they will face, (12b)**

^{12b} **Who can tell** (foretell and guarantee), **a man** (whether it be a spouse, a child, a friend or a stranger), **what will happen** (in his

or her life), **after him** (after he dies), **under the sun**, (in this sin cursed world? But, you can tell them what to focus on.)

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F **APPLICATION:**

If this world is so unstable, unpredictable, even cruel and deadly at times—what is a person responsible and accountable for in such a world? How will God evaluate our life when we enter into eternity? How should I live in this present world in light of these questions?

1. **What am I accountable for...what are my responsibilities as a believer and what are God's...**

- As parents, what are some of your responsibilities? Train up a child—model—teach—affirm—correct—discipline—be consistent—provide a godly environment
 - As a husband, what are some of your responsibilities? Love as Christ loved the church—lead—be faithful
 - As a wife, what are some of your responsibilities? Follow husband—love him—respect him
 - As a child, what are some of your responsibilities? Obey your parents—Respect authority—learn from your instruction—abstain from sinful things—follow your parent's model
 - As a single person, what are some of your responsibilities? Keep yourself pure—more opportunity to serve—keep marriage in prayer—serve with an undivided heart
 - As an employee, what are some of your responsibilities? Do your work as unto the Lord
- ? Now, with what we have learned from God in this chapter, does God guarantee you that if you do your work as unto the Lord your boss will appreciate you and promote you?
- ? Does God guarantee you that if you love your husband or wife as you should that he or she will love you in return?
- ? Does God guarantee parents that if they raise their children up for Him, that they will be godly children?
- ? Does God guarantee you children that if you respect your parents that they will love you in return?
- ? Does God guarantee single person, that if you put a lot more time in serving, that those around you will recognize that and appreciate you for it?

2. **What do we accomplish by keeping (or not keeping), our God given responsibilities?**

To find out the answer to that question, for those who have placed saving faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, you have to go to the Judgment seat of Christ. For those who have not placed saving faith in Christ for salvation, you have to go to the Great White Throne Judgment. First lets examine this question concerning the unsaved.

1) **The Unsaved**

Matthew 7:21-23—²¹ “**Not everyone** who says to Me,” Jesus says, “‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the

will of My Father in heaven, (first be saved). ²² **Many** will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘**I never knew you; depart from Me**, you who practice lawlessness!’ **Now go to Rev. 20:11-15**

2) The Saved

What does meeting our God ordained responsibilities accomplish for those who have placed saving faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, you have to go to the Judgment seat of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:8-10—⁸ We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. ⁹ Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that **each one** may receive the things *done* in the **[or his]** body, according to what **he** has done, whether good or bad. **(Where does it say ANYTHING about how those around you respond to what you have done?!)**

(HOW DOES THIS WORK?) TURN TO 1 COR. 3:5-15 [PAUL IS SPEAKING TO BELIEVERS; v. 1])

You will receive your reward for meeting your God given responsibilities, (e.g., gold, silver and precious stones. If you don’t meet these responsibilities your labor only produces wood, hay and stubble.)

- Kids, you are not held accountable or rewarded for how well your parents respond to your godly behavior. That business is between God and your parents. If godly fruit is the response of your godly behavior, God brought that increase.
- Dad and mom, as your children come of age, you are not held accountable or rewarded for how well your children respond to your godly training. That is between God and your children. The increase is God’s business. They must be in subjection during their early years, but even then they may be rejecting your training on the inside. Later, what is on the inside will come out.
- Husband and wife, you are not held accountable or rewarded for how well your spouse responds to your godly affection. That is between God and your spouse. The increase is God’s business.
- Single person, you are not held accountable or rewarded for how well people around you respond to your godly service. That is between God and those you minister to and with. The increase is God’s business.
- Employees, you are not held accountable or rewarded for how well your boss responds to your godly performance. That is between God and your boss. The increase is God’s business.

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Now we certainly would be blessed additionally if those around us did respond in a positive way to our godly actions. And, everyone would respond in a positive way if this was a perfect world and we were perfect people. But, as God emphatically tells us in Ecclesiastes, the world is not perfect and neither are we. We don't always respond well to the godly actions of others towards us either.

The Apostle Paul, was believed to be single, whom God used to write about a third of the NT and was probably the best teacher of all the apostles. Even Paul, did not see the positive results that he would hope to see and prayed for at times.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28—³ Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. ²⁴ From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; ²⁶ in journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; ²⁷ in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—²⁸ besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. **(How could God let Paul suffer so when Paul was serving God so faithfully!? Because God didn't save us from the natural consequences of a sin cursed world.)**

Proverbs 10:1 clearly states that—“A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son *is* the grief of his mother.” Do you know any godly grieving mothers? Sadly you do. You yourself may even be one.

God tells us in Proverbs 21:19 concerning marriage that it is—“Better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and angry woman.” The same would go for a woman dwelling with that kind of a man. Are there some really hurting spouses out there? Yes, there are, and again you may be one of them.

Listen to what God says to those who work under another's authority, 1 Peter 2:18-23—“¹⁸ Servants, *be* submissive to *your* masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. ¹⁹ For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. ²⁰ For what credit *is it* if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this *is* commendable before God. ²¹ For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ²² “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; ²³ who, when

He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously.”

Even Jesus, God’s Son, suffered the consequences of a sin cursed world. He truly was tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin!

Here are some terrible words of reality for you children, found in Isaiah 49:15—“Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, Yet I will not forget you.” There are parents who do not care about their kids, but God always cares about and for you.

The cold hard fact is: a mate who meets his or her responsibility as a husband or a wife in loving and respecting his or her spouse, may not receive love and respect back. The spouse may even up and leave him or her and/or their children.

The cold hard fact is: The parents who try their best to raise their children may end up broken hearted, and the parents who could care-less what they are doing or where they are end up with kids on the honor roll and one of the communities most honored citizens.

These same cold hard facts apply to kids, singles, employees, etc..

These are all the potential terrible and natural consequences of free will in a sin cursed world. This is why Solomon says that a stillborn child is better off than a man who has lived many years.

Ecclesiastes 6:11-12—Since there are many things that increase vanity, How *is* man the better? For who knows what *is* good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?

I want to encourage you though, that with proper child training (loving, disciplining, teaching, modeling, etc.):

- ç Statistically children are more likely to live godly lives and serve our Lord
- ç God promises that the training our children receive will not depart from them
- ç We are above reproach before our children’s eyes
- ç We have fulfilled God’s will for our child rearing years
- ç We will always be here for our children throughout their lives
- ç We will always be praying for our children
- ç But, our children are calling the shots as to whether they will be Godly or not

3. Now here is a little pop quiz, to see how well you have been paying attention.

1) Question number one:

Bob shares the gospel with Ben, but Ben makes no decision to ask Christ to be his Savior.

Mary shares the gospel with Martha, and Martha places saving faith in Christ as her Savior.

Now, does Mary only receive a reward because Martha accepted Christ and Ben didn't? No. Why? Because it is our responsibility to share the gospel and it is God's responsibility to open their eyes to it. (The actual saving work (the increase as Paul called it), is beyond us and is between God and Martha, and Ben.)

Both are rewarded for fulfilling their responsibilities then, but, does Mary receive a greater reward for Martha accepting Christ? No. For the same reason. (Man gives an account for what HE has done, (or not done)).

2) Question number two:

Think of the prophet Jeremiah doing the Lord's work. It is generally thought that he didn't have a single convert throughout his entire ministry! He served as God's official prophet for about 40 years. He experienced intense sorrow at the hands of those he served. He was opposed at every corner, often beaten, spent most of his time alone, and suffered imprisonment. He is nicknamed the "Weeping Prophet," because he cried so much. Did people not responding to Jeremiah's ministry affect his receiving any rewards?! No. Only his personal obedience in serving God affected his rewards.

3) Question number three:

Final question. The Smith's and Jones' both were believers. Both families faithfully and lovingly raised their children by God's principles with all their heart. Every one of the Smith's children are now on their own and serving the Lord themselves, but only one of the Jones' four children are. One of the four is even in jail, and the other two are living for the world.

Does this mean that the Smith's were better parents and can say to all those around them, if you raise your children just like we did you will for certain, you are guaranteed to have godly children too? No. Remember this, when you read someone's book, listen to their tapes or even listen to them speak somewhere and say you are guaranteed results if you follow their program.

Will the Smith's have more rewards or a greater reward than the Jones' for the way their children turned out? No. Why? Because both met their responsibilities. (Man gives an account for what HE has done, (or not done)).

You also have to figure into the picture the fact that all 8 of the kids haven't run their full course yet. The only difference between the Smith's and Jones' is that one of them will go to the grave with less sorrow than the other.

A famous speaker I was listening to mentioned that parents take credit for their good kids, but not their bad kids. He went on to say that they have to take credit for both of them. In reality though, they can't take credit for either **IF** they trained them properly. How children respond to the training is between them and God. Kids are accountable to God for their choices regardless of their training though.

4. Warning

Be careful not to be like Job's friends in this area. When Job wasn't experiencing the same kinds of blessings that they were, their interpretation was that Job was in the wrong. When in fact, he was a righteous man. When they didn't see the results that they expected to see from Job's life, they were all too quick to attack him, his motives and actions. Poor Job had no control at all over what was happening to him or his family. Be careful here, don't be a friend that heaps sorrow upon an already broken heart.

The same principle follows through in all other areas. (Man gives an account for what HE has done, (or not done). God brings the increase.

5. Conclusion

We are held accountable and rewarded for being obedient to our responsibilities not for the results they produce. Time will create the potential for more rewards, but not necessarily godly results—results are the fruit that only the individual and God can claim.

John 14:12-14—¹² “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, **the works** that I do he will do also; and **greater works** (greater in number, not in quality), than these he will do, **because** I go to My Father, (you are going to still be here to serve, and I am not). ¹³ And whatever **you ask in My name**, that **I will do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If **you ask** anything in My name, **I will do it**. (The results (or increase), is God's business.)

Was Christ accountable for how people responded to His teaching?
No. He was responsible to teach.

- God **created** a perfect man and woman.
- God **placed** them in a perfect environment.
- God **made** His instructions perfectly clear.
- God **loved** them with a perfect heart.

But, did God receive godly results from all of His labor? Did Adam and Eve respond in godly way? No. Did God fail then? Was God a bad Father? No.

Matthew 16:18—And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock **I** will build **My** church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

It is proper to **expect** results and to always **plan** and **pray** for positive results. But, Solomon says that we have to understand that in this sin cursed world, we won't always see godly **fruit** from our labor.

We are accountable for only so much but, if we as believers do not understand what we are accountable for and what may happen to us and/or to those we love—it can crush us.

Sometimes your dreams and heart are going to be broken. But, be of good cheer, for our Lord tells us that He has overcome this fallen, cursed world. Not only has our Lord conquered this world, but He also will in His sovereign control, balance our pleasant and difficult circumstances our during our lifetime as He did with Joseph, the son of Jacob.

God gives us wise counsel through the Apostle Paul in Galatians 6:3-10 when He says, ***“For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load. Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches. Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”***

The Apostle Paul said in Philippians 1:21—***For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.***

The thing that excites us and “turns us on” is the thing that really is “life” to us. In Paul’s case, Christ was his life. Christ excited him and made his life worth living.

[Philippians 1:21](#) becomes a valuable test of our lives. “For to me to live is _____ and to die is _____.”

Fill in the blanks yourself.

“For to me to live is *money* and to die is *to leave it all behind.*”

“For to me to live is *fame* and to die is *to be forgotten.*”

“For to me to live is *power* and to die is *to lose it all.*”

No, we must echo Paul’s convictions if we are going to have joy in spite of circumstances, and if we are going to share in the furtherance of the Gospel. “For to me to live is *Christ*, and to die is *gain!*”¹

¹ Wiersbe, [The Bible Exposition Commentary](#). Online.

Get your focus in focus! God came to deliver our soul and spirit from sin, not our body or to heal this sin cursed world. But, in giving us eternal life, we can also have a more abundant life in spite of our body while here upon this earth. Jesus experienced the consequences of a sin cursed world and sinful people, yet He still had joy because He maintained His focus. The Apostle Paul and many others did the same, and so can we. **The key to our focus is not in what we have or in what happens to us. The key is how we view what we have and how we deal with what happens to us.**

Live to keep your God given responsibilities regardless of the results. But when you see godly results, and you will (hopefully more often than not), don't you dare take credit for them! Praise and thank God for them realizing that you have been spared some measure of sorrow. Rejoice in them! Testifying to others of His grace and mercy towards you by giving Him FULL credit for them.