

## Ecclesiastes-“The Earth Remains Forever”

In the “wisdom literature” of Ecclesiastes, Solomon wrote that, “generations come and go, but the earth remains forever” (Ec. 1:4). Solomon lamented that he had owned much property, built many grand houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, etc., but it was all vanity and chasing after the wind because like everyone, he “came from the dust and all return to the dust and exactly as a man is born, thus he will die” (Ec. 3:20, 5:16). Solomon was the richest man in the world as we read in 1 Kings 7-10. His awesome palatial mansion took 13 years to build, it was situated on the best ground with the best view, it had the best and most costly materials, and was matched by no other real estate in the land. Solomon’s annual income just in gold was 666 talents per year, he had a large throne built of pure ivory, and we read that he had so much silver that it was as common as ordinary rocks. A talent was a unit of measurement equal to about 30+ kilograms so by my reckoning Solomon’s income in gold was about one billion dollars per year, not to mention real estate, silver, diamonds, cash, etc. Nevertheless, he looked back on his worldly wealth and accomplishments as fleeting like trying to catch the wind, but God and His creation remain forever. Solomon went for twelve chapters in Ecclesiastes reviewing how futile materialism and personal glory are since his life was short lived and he could not take his stuff with him. Therefore his simple conclusion is all the more dramatic for we the students. In Ec. 12:13, Solomon says, “fear God and keep His commandments”. This is his way of saying that the purpose of life is to serve God in a loving relationship in which we glorify God and not ourselves. That loving relationship is eternal and God’s glory is eternal, as opposed to all the stuff in the world that is passing away, including our mortal bodies.

## Robert E. Lee House at Arlington National Cemetery

I just visited the most beautiful piece of land I’ve ever seen which sits high on a green luscious hill overlooking the Potomac River. Across the river is Washington DC. Upon this scenic hill sits the historic Robert E. Lee house. Currently it is the home of our nation’s national military cemetery situated on 624 acres of beautiful real estate. The land contains over 400,000 graves of our nation’s military who gallantly served their country. Originally, the land was acquired in 1802 by George Custis, who was the grandson of George and Martha Washington. George Custis left it to his daughter Mary who married Robert E. Lee in 1831. It was their home when Lee was not off serving in the military. In 1861, after Virginia seceded from the Union, Robert E. Lee resigned his commission in the U. S. Army to take command of the army of Virginia. On May 24, Union General McDowell occupied the Arlington estate and the Lee house, and it remained in the hands of the U. S. Military throughout the

Civil War. Mary Custis Lee was prevented from paying taxes on the property and in 1864 the federal government acquired the property in a rigged auction tax sale. In May of 1864, there was a large number of Union dead at the "Battle of the Wilderness", and they decided to bury them at Arlington as it was "high on a hill, free from floods, and a great view of D. C.", but even better it would prevent the Lees from re-occupying the house and land after the war. After the war, Robert E. Lee made no attempt to reclaim the property, and he died in 1870. I can't help but compare Lee to Solomon in his popularity and real estate. Like Solomon, he had it all, but in the end it was just chasing the wind. Just like Solomon he came into the world naked and he left it naked, and the only thing that remains is his relationship with the eternal God. Two great successful men loved and respected by many, and owners of fabulous property, but at the end of the day it was all "gone with the wind" and only their standing with God is now important.

In 1874, Custis Lee, the oldest son of Robert E Lee, sued the U. S. A. for ownership of the house and acreage, and in 1882 the Supreme Court decided the property had been confiscated without due process, and the property was deeded back to Custis Lee. Custis Lee then promptly sold it back to our government for \$ 150,000, which is approximately \$ 3.7 million in today's money. The house is now a museum at Arlington National Cemetery known as the "Robert E. Lee Memorial".

Job, Paul, Peter, and John

We are all familiar with the Bible story of Job where the righteous man, Job, lost his considerable property and livestock and home. Then worst of all, he lost his entire family, but perhaps you didn't know his immediate reaction in Job 1:21, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will return. The Lord gave and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord". Job knew that as wonderful as it was to have had all the property, wealth, and a beautiful healthy family, it all belonged to the Lord who created all things. We are all in the habit of saying "my family, my home, my ranch, my business" but in our hearts we know it all belongs to the Lord. It all exists according to His good pleasure, and we were blessed to have it in the time we did enjoy these blessings from God. We talk about "the patience of Job", but where did that patience come from? As the Scripture says, "The righteous man shall live by faith". A good definition of that biblical faith of Job can be found in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval (from God)". In other words Job put his faith in God's promise to bring about our hope in the resurrection unto eternal life, and God's power to bring good even out of what appeared to be terrible circumstances. Based on that desired

expectancy, Job praised God in the midst of adverse events.

The Apostle Paul had left his disciple Timothy in Ephesus to continue instructing the new churches there, and in 1 Timothy 6:5-12, Paul warns Timothy and the churches about false teachers who are in it for the money. The contrast Paul gave concerns how people value what is important—personal property and wealth or the things of God. The first contrast is our definition of what is “great gain”. To believers in Christ gain is the pursuit of godliness, but to people whose love is for money and stuff, their love is a “root of all sorts of evil”. Faithful believers are moved by their realization that “we have brought nothing into this world, so we cannot take anything out of it either”. 1 Timothy 6:12 is the theme of Paul’s letter, “Fight the good fight of faith, take hold of the eternal life to which you were called”. Timothy was to give his best efforts to keep the faith and pursue his relationship with Christ. His faith here involved the realization at all times of the fact that he possessed eternal life. All believers are to persevere through life’s struggles with the belief that at the goal line we will receive that great promise of Christ that “our citizenship is in heaven from which also we wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Phil.3:20). Our motivation for living godly lives is our hope of the return of Christ to take us to heaven to be with Him forever.

In 1 Peter 1:3-4, Simon Peter wrote to the churches a similar message that Paul gave to Timothy. Peter wrote, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has caused us to be born again to a living hope...to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you who are protected by the power of God through our faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (glorification and resurrection)”. Believers have a current living hope of what Jesus is going to do in the future, which keeps us living for Him now in the present.

In 1 John 2:15-17, the Apostle John wrote to the churches encouraging them to love God and each other instead of all the stuff in the present fallen world, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life is not from God, but is from the world”. At this present time people like their stuff and like to feel that they have more and are more than other people, but don’t forget that “the world is passing away and also it’s lusts, but the one who does the will of God abides forever”.

Let us Learn from History

Whether we read about Solomon, Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Robert E Lee, or anyone else who had great fortune or fame we should remember the lesson from history. Caesar actually had a guy ride in his chariot whispering in his ear during his victory parades that “All

glory is fleeting” in order to keep him humble. But still at the height of his power he wanted more, and he lost everything. Let us be like Job who had it all, lost it all, and eventually got it all back, and in the end of the book basically says, “God has all the power to do all that He said He will do, so who am I to talk or complain about what I can’t understand? The plan of God is too awesome for me to know, but I trust all things to Him”. Paul wrote in Philippians 4 that he also had experienced great prosperity, but many times had to get along with humble means, so his faith enabled him to learn “the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”. That’s the secret-it’s all about Christ.

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