

'SMOKE & MIRRORS'
(Seeing Clearly in A Smoke-filled World of Trick Mirrors)
Studies in Ecclesiastes

'Then What?'

Once upon a time there was a remote and primitive island. On this island people were happy and content with their simple tropical life of fishing. One day a ship that was thrown off course by a storm sailed in for a visit after sighting the island. The captain of the ship asked the island chief if he would partner with him in selling fish in other places. The chief asked him why, since they were happy with a simple life of fishing. The captain replied that he would become rich beyond imagination. The chief asked, **'Then, what?'** The captain said then you could fish and earn much more money. The chief asked, **'Then, what?'** The captain said that he could then hire people to do the fishing for him, so he could move away and live in luxury from the fishing business. The chief asked, **'Then, what?'** The captain said, *'Well, then when you get old and want to retire, you can move to a remote island somewhere, be happy and fish all you want for the rest of your life!'* The wise old chief smiled, shook his head, turned and got into his boat to go fishing.

Wise people in this life always ask, **'Then, what?'** about everything *under the sun* that tries to lure him or her into anything. Whether it's decisions about your future, your finances or even your physical body, the question the Lord wants you to ask is, **'Then, what?'** *'If I do this, whatever it is, what will it lead to, how will it influence me and others, what impact will this make on my future and how will this affect my personal relationship with God?'* The wise Christian also asks, *'when I get old and look back on this thing I'm doing, will I be proud or ashamed about what I did?'* When I talk with my future spouse from God about my past, *'Will this bless them or break their heart when they hear the truth about what I did? And finally, 'when I stand before God and give account for what I did, will it bring 'Well done!' and reward from the Savior or not?'* **'Then, what?'** is a simple critical question to ask throughout life in **'testing the spirits to see whether they are from God'** (1 John 4:1).

As in the story above, often the lure isn't to do something particularly sinful, it's just to do something that unnecessarily complicates your simple life of peace and contentment God is blessing with happiness and fruitfulness (1 Thess. 4:11-12). Like the wise old native chief who kept asking **'Then, what?'** of the ambitious captain's grand plans for him, wise people must do the same thing with all who come into their life making it more complicated, difficult, and stressed (*all to get more money, physical gratification or material things for the moment*) only to, in the end, return you to where you were in the first place, but worn down, stressed and full of regret! Then the next painful questions to be asked at the end of such a detoured life are: **'What was the point?'** and **'How am I going to explain this foolish waste of my life to God?'** (2 Cor. 5:10).

Solomon concludes his world view philosophy with a poetic view of old age in **Ecclesiastes 12:1-8**. His metaphor-filled picture of aging is a prophecy of everyone who physically endures to or beyond the biblical average life-span of 70-80 years (Psalm 90:10). That biblical average can be blessed with more years if a person is dedicated to godly living (Proverbs 3:2, 16; 9:10-12, etc.) like Caleb (Joshua 14:10-11 / *Scripture doesn't even say how old he was when he died*). But the point is, regardless of how many years you are allowed by God *'under the sun'* what are the memories you are making now for yourself and others that will sustain you in the end. When the physical part of you is in decline, will you have lots to smile about because in the younger years as you lived out your life *'under the sun,'* it was lived for God *'under heaven,'* also? Solomon would have agreed with the Apostle Paul's writing to the Corinthians: *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day...."* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)". You only travel this life once – keep it simple, work hard at a job you like and are good at, keep God first in everything – this is the good life *'under heaven'* that needs to be protected with the question for anything or anybody trying to change it – **'Then, what?!'** PtL

‘Twilight Time’

(At the End of the Day, what was Your Life?)

Ecclesiastes 12:1-8

Living ‘Under Heaven’

(The twilight time of youth)

11:9-2:1-2

- Please read these verses and discuss what age group you think the Lord has in mind.
- Talk about how these verses relate to you and your stage of life right now. (If you’re middle aged or older (35+), did you live like these verses when you were younger? If not, talk about how life might have been different if you had.
- Do you think most Christian young people you know live this way? What parts of this passage tend to be omitted? What will be the consequences of not living this way?
- Living like this in your teen years on into your twenties tends to shape a lifestyle that will continue throughout life. What important life decisions will you make that will be influenced by these patterns established in these formative years?

Living ‘Under the Sun’

(The twilight time of aging)

12:3-8

- If these verses describe biblical aging, it happens at different times for people, not at a particular number of years. Aging will happen but getting old (*physical and spiritual decline*) depends on how well one has taken care of both and of course, God’s will.
- Read **Proverbs 3:1-2, 7-8, 13-18; 9:10-11** – What factors influence length and quality of a Christian’s life?
- Read **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**: Discuss how a disciple of Christ can get spiritually younger and younger ‘*inside*’ (*spiritual and mental*) even though the ‘*outside*’ (*physical*) is aging.
- How important will it be to you when you get old that you have great memories of using your time, talent and treasure for the Lord when you were younger and healthier?

Living ‘Under God’s Will’

(The guiding light of Scripture)

12:9-14

(Next time)