

# The *Silver* Lining



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He took his blackened brush and sweep it across the canvas mumbling, “O vanity of vanities! All is vanity.” Held captured by thought, he muttered, “What does man gain from labor in the hot sun, generations come and go, the sun rises and sets, the wind blows, streams flow, the eyes never have enough seeing or ears hearing. It has all been done before; there is nothing new under the sun.”

He stopped and standing back, he admired the single stroke, as if it were a masterpiece, until he spied the imperfection. In haste, he filled his brush and moved across the canvas like a storm.

“There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow. Meaningless, meaningless, utterly meaningless!”

The abrasive strokes of the brush silenced the story.

“But—” He said, “I studied, I achieved and undertook great projects: built grand homes, established plantations of fine grapes producing awarding-winning wines. I designed gardens and parks carving the uncultivated into an Eden of flowers, shrubs, and trees.”

He picked up a rounded-flat brush and painted soft grey curves creating a place for space and a boundary for time.

“I am no ignorant man!” he shouted. “I have grown in wisdom more than anyone else. I am rich in knowledge and understanding. I have applied myself to understanding both wisdom and folly, but concluded it is a chasing after the wind.”

He turned away from the canvas, mumbling, “Wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but—the

same fate overtakes them both.” He sighed. “With much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.”

He looked back and began to stare. He propped his folded hand under his chin and inched towards the canvas studying it with the eyes of a prosecutor.

He came to an abrupt stop and lifted his arm with his index finger pointing up and said, “A man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This is meaningless and a great misfortune! What does a man get for all his toil and anxious labor in the hot sun!”

He took the widest brush from the tin and smothered it in the purest black directly from the tube. Wildly, without any visible notion of control, he painted over the canvas until he was exhausted—a shell of a man, he collapsed in the old arm chair.

Defeated, he hung his head, until a curious thought entered and he said, “There is a time for everything. Everything has a fore-determined time, the happening time, the end time—everything.”

Pressing up against the arms of the old chair, he walked back towards his opponent. His hand hovered over the brushes, selecting a fine bristle brush and with surgical care, he painted in shades of white and grey cloudy wisps and cotton-ball puffs, whispering under his breath, “God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be time for every activity, a time for every deed.”

“And—” He hesitated enough to take a quick breath, “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Listen!” He stopped and stood back, studying his work.

“Hearing will move you to obey God—obedience is better than sacrifices. God is in heaven and man is on earth. In prayer, be thoughtful with your words, mindless babblings are meaningless.” He returned to the canvas with eyes closed and whispered, “Stand in awe of God.”

“It’s good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun, during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot—more, a gift from God,” he reasoned out loud while turning slightly, he acknowledged his opponent and chuckled, then mumbled, “He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart—hah!”

Suddenly, he dropped the brush and pressed into the tight muscles across his forehead.

“Another evil under the sun, it weighs heavily on men, when a stranger enjoys the fruits of his labor or a man who has one hundred children and lives many years, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity!” He concluded, “You are better off never have been born.”

He sighed and searched to find the perfect brush to image his frustration. His hand hung over his collection. His thoughts kept sounding. "Even if a man lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity, he is worse off than one who was never born—for rest was given immediately to the unborn, the living wait enduring the burdens of life."

A flat square-end brush caught his eye. He reached into the tin and rubbed his thumb against the bristles.

"A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. Death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart."

He picked up the small flat curved-edged brush mixing colors, as he added, "Do not be over-righteous, neither be over-wise—why destroy yourself? Do not be over wicked and do not be a fool—why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes."

The colour mix was wrong. He pressed abruptly on the tube pushing out black paint across his palette onto the floor and cried, "Where are the upright? God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes—" He sighed. "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong, but it will not go well with them, their days will not be lengthened like a shadow."

From his box, he picked up a tube of white and squeezed a sample onto his palette. "Meaningless," he muttered. "I say meaningless. Righteous men who get what the wicked deserve and wicked men who get what the righteous deserve. So—eat, drink and be glad for there is nothing more enjoyable under the sun."

His opponent remained silent, while he held his ground. "I reflected on all this and say that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him. All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. So—go, eat your food with gladness, drink your wine with a joyful heart, live within the moral boundaries. Enjoy life with your wife whom you love in this meaningless life, all of your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life."

From out of the heavy dark canvas, a story became visible. He worked the brush like a beast of burden. He could not hold back his words. "Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. But, be careful to remember, God will bring you to judgment, before those days of trouble come when you grow old, feeble, and helpless—death approaches stealing everything away from you until you return to dust. Pointless! Pointless! Everything is pointless!"

She interjected with two sharp coughs. "From the moment you asked, I stood by you all the days of your life, O king of Israel," she said.

“I asked for wisdom, but you are sorrow,” he muttered.

“What is your conclusion of the matter?” she asked.

He took a deep breath and released a long sigh. Examining the brushes, he chose a detail-rounded brush. Taking care, he drew outlines of white against the clouds of black and grey. Speaking quietly, he replied, “All has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: **Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it be good or evil.**”



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She nodded. “You are right when you say that the fear of God presides over the enjoyment of life, regulating and hallowing it. However, failing to penetrate into the inward fountain of true happiness, which is independent of the outward, has caused you to make exaggerated and ungrateful demands on earthly life. It remains a mystery to you that life deepened into fellowship with God is in itself most real and blessed—the highest and most rewarding of good things.”

<https://www.study-light.org/commentaries/kdo/ecclesiastes-6.html>

He acknowledged her reply and sat in the old arm chair staring at the canvas.

“O Solomon,” she added, “if it is sorrow you feel, it is because I have taught you to see the vast expanse between the futility of earthly life in contrast to the eternal, all-encompassing power of your Creator, God. The silver lining on your canvas is not only the understanding of the benefits of fearing God but the eternal joy that comes from loving God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength. He offers all of mankind the invitation to join His holy, royal ruling family **as a son of God** in His kingdom. It is then and there that your labor becomes richly satisfying. Ask God for that intimate relationship, then you will be forever satisfied.”

*Compiled by Janette Andrejowich*