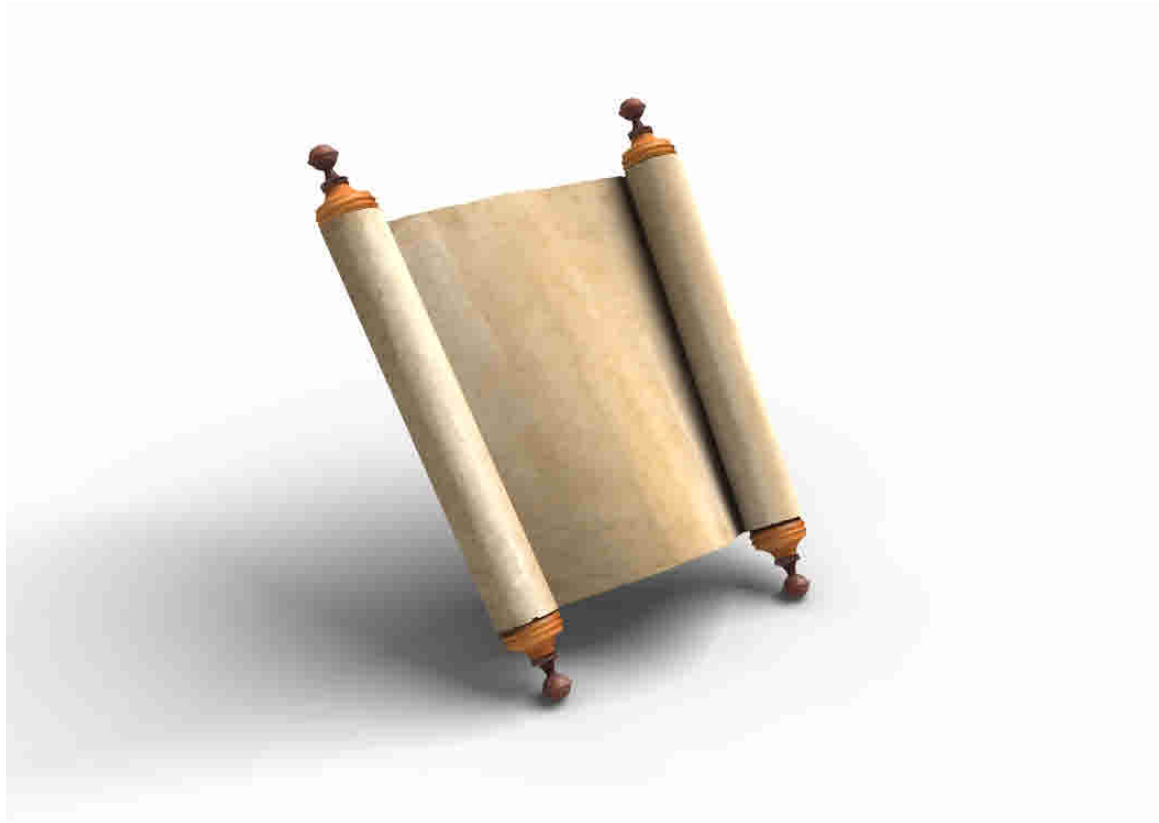


A Study Through

Ecclesiastes



By
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Introduction

The Book of Ecclesiastes

The Title

Among the Hebrews, the book of Ecclesiastes was known as “Qoheleth” (Koheleth), which is the Hebrew word for preacher. The name is taken from several references in the book in which the author refers to himself as “the Preacher” (1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8, 9, 10). Around 250 B.C., the Old Testament Scriptures were translated from Hebrew into Greek. At that time the book was given the name “Ekklestastes” which is Greek for preacher. By definition, the preacher is one who calls out or calls forth. The words of this book call for us to learn true wisdom.

The Theme of the Book

Without a proper understanding of the theme and purpose of Ecclesiastes, one may read this book and come to the conclusion that it is very dark and pessimistic. On the contrary, Ecclesiastes is a very optimistic book. It begins with the statement, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” and thus seems to have a pessimistic beginning. However, such statements must be considered in the context of the whole book. The purpose of the writer in Eccl. 1:1-11 is to get the reader’s attention. And that he does. But what is written in the first portion of the book begins to make much more sense as the reader moves on through the rest of the book. The conclusion which the author is directing us toward is that life on this earth, if that is all a person strives after, is indeed vanity. His conclusion is not that life on earth has no meaning, but that if we want to have true purpose and meaning in our lives we must learn to “fear God and keep His commandments,” as stated in the author’s final conclusion. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil” (Eccl. 12:13, 14).

The book of Ecclesiastes is written in such a way that one person may benefit from its message in a very different way than another person. It is not a book of doctrines, such as Romans, Galatians, or Hebrews. Rather, it is a book that focuses on life in general. It is a book of instruction, not concerning spiritual truths, but concerning one’s attitude and values as they consider life “under the sun.” It is impossible for an honest, godly person to study through Ecclesiastes and not have his/her mind turned inside out, to have his/her values completely rearranged. The wisdom contained in Ecclesiastes pierces the inner most reaches of our lives, forcing the reader to come to some necessary conclusions concerning his/her purpose on this earth.

The Date and Author

Both the date and the author of this book are subjects of no small dispute among Bible scholars. Up until about 1530 A.D. Solomon, the son of David, was commonly accepted as the author. But beginning with Martin Luther, many scholars have argued that Solomon could not have been the author and that the book must have been written after Solomon’s time. It is not the intention of this author to prove or to deny the exact identity of the writer of Ecclesiastes, but to simply put forth a few observations and possible conclusions and leave the rest up to the reader.

If Solomon was indeed the author, the book would have been written round 954 B.C. There is much evidence to suggest that this is the case. The first evidence is in Eccl. 1:1, where the author describes

himself as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” Solomon was of course the son of David. In Eccl. 1:16 the author describes himself as having great wisdom. “Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.” Of all the kings who reined in Israel, only of Solomon was it written, “*For he was wiser than all men...and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five*” (1 Kings 4:32-32). Concerning his own works and wealth, the Preacher wrote in Eccl. 2:9, “So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.” Again, of all the kings the ruled in Jerusalem, Solomon was the only one to whom this description could be attributed.

However, there is also evidence which suggests that the author was not Solomon. In all but the first two chapters there is nothing that describes Solomon or the times of Solomon. Also, in the writings of Solomon (Proverbs and Song of Solomon), Jehovah is used as the name of God many times, but not so in Ecclesiastes. In 1 Kings 4:32-33 it states all of the accomplishments of Solomon and his wisdom, but there is no mention of a book of wisdom such as Ecclesiastes. Also, in Eccl. 3:16 the Preacher describes the moral conditions of judges and leaders saying, “In the place of judgment, Wickedness was there; And in the place of righteousness, Iniquity was there.” This description seems to be in conflict with the description of Solomon’s time in 1 Kings 4:24-25, “For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the River from Tiphshah even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.” Unable to harmonize these two passage, some suggest that the book was written by a wise man who lived sometime after Solomon, but who used Solomon as the main figure in order to teach a lesson. That is, Solomon is the character described in the first two chapters which the writer used to set forth the principles of the vanity of wisdom, of pleasure, of wealth, and of power. Solomon had the greatest of all of these vanities of vanity.

Once again, regardless of whether one chooses to accept the evidence for or against Solomon as the author, the wisdom revealed in the book is undeniable. Ultimately, as Scripture, the book of Ecclesiastes is the word of God, not men (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The important things is that we benefit from the lessons to be learned, and allow the words of the Preacher to direct our minds toward living life on this earth in the way God intended.

The Purpose of the Book

The author poses the same question that many have asked throughout history, “What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” (Eccl. 1:3). Indeed, a man is born, he labors and toils, then he dies. So what is our purpose here and what benefit is there to life? The author investigates the benefits and wonders of this life for himself to see what kind of fulfillment a man can expect to attain. What we have is the wisdom and counsel gleaned from his search. His message is meant to compel those who are self-sufficient to discard their comfortable, self-flattering illusions and face honestly the instability of all those materialistic props upon which he attempts to base his security. Everything in this life is vanity and useless. Man cannot find fulfillment in life under the sun.

The good thing that this book brings out is that this life, with all of its vanities, functions exactly as God designed it. God made this world in such a way that men will realize the vanity of trying to find earthly fulfillment and therefore turn their hearts to Him. Only in God can man find any kind of fulfillment and lasting happiness. This is the conclusion that the preacher makes in chapter twelve. In other words, its design or purpose is to wean us from the love of this world.

Important Phrases in the Book

“Vanity of Vanities”: Eccl. 1:2. Vanity refers to that which is fleeting, empty, or no good. Many look at this phrase as being very pessimistic. However, when we consider the conclusion in 12:13, this phrase is very fitting. If there is no God, no reward, no life after “life under the sun,” then all of our efforts and all of our toils on this earth are indeed in vain. The Preacher brings this out throughout the book. If all we seek is physical fulfillment, we will never find it, therefore it is vanity. By starting out his book in such a manner, the Preacher is very effective at getting the reader’s attention and making his point.

“Grasping for the wind”: Eccl. 2:11 Just as one reaches for the wind to take it in his hand yet grasps nothing, it is the same for those who seek fulfillment in the pleasures of this life. We can seek total fulfillment in this life all we want, but to do so is as vain as trying to grasp a handful of wind. It is a poetic way of saying something is a waste of time.

“Under the Sun”: Eccl. 1:3. Life on this earth takes place under the sun. This is important for the reader to understand when the Preacher talking about the vanities of life. In the first eleven chapters of the book the author is talking about life on this earth with no regard to heaven or eternity. He examines man’s relationship to this earthly life; how he can find happiness now. His purpose is to show that all things in life under the sun is vain when we take God out of the equation.

“Eat drink and enjoy the good of all his labor”: Eccl. 3:13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7. In the days of Paul were people who followed an epicurean philosophy which taught that this life was all that there was, therefore a person should experience every thing they can find that will bring happiness now, for tomorrow we die (Acts 17:18). Some have tried to connect Ecclesiastes this with kind of philosophy. However, when the Preacher says, “Eat, drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor,” he is not teaching the epicurean philosophy of “eat drink and be merry,” with no regard to God. On the contrary, he is teaching us that there are things in this life that God has intended for man to enjoy. God has given man a great blessing in this life—the ability to enjoy one’s home, one’s family, the fruit of one’s labor. These are blessings from God that it is good for man to enjoy in life under the sun. This statement is meant to be taken to heart by those who do nothing but work; who over-work. There are those who labor and toil and worry and fret and never enjoy the fruit of their labor, and yet they still do not stop to appreciate the blessings God has given them in this life—they do not stop to appreciate God. Many people rush and are in a hurry, but when they die, what good was all of their labor? Therefore, as the Preacher says, don’t forget to take time to enjoy the fruits of your labor, for such is what God intended for man under the sun.

Questions

Introduction

1. What is the book of Ecclesiastes called in the Hebrew Bible? What does it mean?
2. What does the word “ecclesiastes” mean? What Greek word is it derived from?
3. According to Jewish and early Christian tradition, who is the author, and when was the book likely written?
4. What question does the Preacher seek to answer in this book? (1:3)
5. What is the purpose or main point made by the Preacher in this book.
6. In your own words, briefly define the important phrases in the book:
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

Ecclesiastes

Chapter One

Introduction

Eccl. 1:1-2

1:1: “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem.”: Preacher is the translation of the Hebrew word “koheleth.” In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, known as the Septuagint, the word is “ekklesiastes” from which the current name of the book is derived. The Preacher is one who collects, or assembles people to proclaim a message. This Preacher describes himself as the “son of David, king of Jerusalem,” a description that seems to best prove Solomon as the author. The author was one who had the authority and the means to accomplish all that is mentioned throughout the book.

1:2: “*‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’*”: This is an important term for the reader to understand. Vanity is “...used of that which soon vanishes away, like a vapour, or a bubble; to breathe, to become vain, insignificant and worthless...a breath, breathing, e.g. of air, a gentle breeze...transient, frail...empty, fruitless” (Wilson, pg. 465). The Preacher begins by telling the reader what life under the sun is all about. He grabs the readers’ attention by proclaiming that life is worthless, useless-- vain. This is the conclusion, but throughout the next eleven chapters the Preacher will go about showing why he has come to this conclusion and what we can do about it.

Vanity of Vanities

Eccl. 1:3-8

1:3: “What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?”: He is asking, what of all his labors can a man store up that can benefit him for tomorrow? What of all his hard work will make him happy and fulfill his life for tomorrow? Money? Possessions? But all of these things will pass away. Even those who do find worldly riches in this life, their days are filled with grief and turmoil. With time, anything we come to enjoy will be spent, but what is there to hold on to when those things are gone? If we experience joy one day, will that make us happy when we experience sadness tomorrow? What about when we die? Of all of our labors under the sun, what will it profit us after we have left this earth? Is there anything that will endure forever?

1:4-7: “One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. 5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose. 6 The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit. 7 All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.”: Such has been the pattern of things since the beginning. He is dealing with the fleetingness of time and the relentless cycle of life under the sun. One generation goes and a new generation takes its place. Likewise, the sun goes up and goes down, and there is nothing that man can do to change that. As generations go through their cycles and the sun goes through its cycle, so the wind goes through its cycle. Repeating and repeating, over and over, nothing changing. The water also has gone through its cycle week after week, month after month, year after year. Nothing has changed. All of these things indicate the observation of a man. As time goes on there is a weariness about it. It is transitory, monotonous, repetitious—the same thing over and over again. Though the book was written by the inspiration of God, the inspiration of God is not required to see the constant repetition of life on this earth. Through these cycles men labor, but what he can do that will give him fulfillment through the next vain cycle of life? Nothing.

Vs. 8: “All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.”: The same repetition that can be seen in nature is also true with mankind. Man look’s at a river

and it is the same today as it was yesterday and so it will be tomorrow: the water flows down and continues through its cycle. Like the ocean, the senses of men are continually being fed (eyes, ears), but they never get full; the mind constantly searches but never finds rest. A man labors one year, but when the next year comes, is there anything stored up from all his previous labors that he is able to claim? Nothing. Just as he worked one year, so he must do the next, and the year after than until he leaves this earth. There is no true fulfillment to be found in life on this earth. It is nothing but a constant, repetitious, wearisome cycle. Such is life under the sun.

Nothing New Under the Sun

Eccl. 1:9-11

1:9: “That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.”: Some may say, “But Preacher, I see many new things.” He is not talking about inventions or methods of doing things. He is talking about human experience in life. As one generation goes and another comes, the new generation is going to have the same kinds of experiences, the same kinds of battles, and the same kinds of decisions as the previous generation. A man is born, he grows up, he chooses whether or not to have a family, he chooses how hard he is going to work to provide for that family, he grows old and he dies. So it is generation after generation. Concerning the works of men, there is nothing on this earth that man has created from nothing. He takes the elements that exist and arranges them in various ways according to his imagination—to make a cart or a car, a radio or a TV—but that which makes up those things has been in existence since the beginning. The purpose such inventions fulfill have been fulfilled in times past but in different ways. There is nothing new.

1:10: “*Is there anything of which it may be said, ‘See, this is new’? It has already been in ancient times before US.*”: From generation to generation, there is nothing new, for history simply repeats itself. Televisions may seem relatively new, but it is merely one form of entertainment added to a list of other forms of entertainment which men have pursued since the beginning. Whatever accomplishments we see taking place today are accomplishments that other men have made in their own time—the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Romans—they were all great in their own time, but after them came generations with their own accomplishments and then take note of those because we simply have no remembrance of things past.

1:11: “There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after.”: We think we have new things because we have no remembrance of the accomplishments and struggles of past generations. Sure we have a few remnants and relics that we can piece together, but relatively, what do we have to see all that went on in past generations? Nothing! So it will be when this generation is gone. Our grandchildren may remember who we are, maybe even our great-grandchildren. But what about after that? Will they know of our experiences, struggles, and accomplishments? No. They will simply have to face the same experiences, struggles and accomplishments for themselves. But our slight mark on this earth will have disappeared.

This verse concludes the introductory thesis of the book—the vanity of life under the sun. It explains why “all is vanity.” No matter how hard man tries, no matter how much effort he puts into making a lasting impression on this earth or accomplishing something through which he can profit after his toils are over—all of his labors simply go to waste. If we look for fulfillment in this life then we are indeed grasping for the wind.

The Grief of Wisdom

Eccl. 1:12-15

1:12-13: “I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised.”: Once again the author gives a description of who he is. He is stating his credentials, showing that he certainly has the wisdom and the means to search out the question presented in Eccl. 1:3. He then explains why he came to the conclusion stated in the previous section. These verses also set the tone for the rest of the book. He explains to the reader that his conclusions in Eccl. 1:3 and in Eccl. 12:13 are not arbitrary conclusions made by some grump who is dissatisfied with life. He is showing that his conclusions are the result of intense,

calculated searching done with all of his heart. It is a burdensome (difficult, painful) task that he has set out to complete. He applied his heart to wisdom. Whatever wisdom is to be had in matters of finance and wealth, in human pleasure, in agriculture, or whatever, the preacher applied his heart to wisdom in all of these matters to see if there is anything in which man can find true fulfillment.

1:14: “I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.”: This is a man who has tried it all; “I have seen all the works...” Notice that he applies his conclusion to things that are done “under the sun.” The Preacher, by his wisdom, was able to see all the works of man and has come to the conclusion that all is vanity, it is fleeting, it is grasping for the wind.

1:15: “What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered.”: There are many tasks that men put their hands to do. He labors and toils in order to leave a lasting mark, but it is not possible. A man may set his hand to straighten that which is crooked, but he cannot. He may try to do away with poverty, but he cannot. Neither can he cure sickness, starvation, nor crime. That which is crooked cannot be made straight. Man does not have the wisdom in himself to number that which is lacking—to comprehend everything so that he can solve all problems. He may try, but it is vanity and striving after the wind. The lesson to be learned is that, if a person is trying to find fulfillment in this repetitious and labor-intense life, he will not find it.

The Reality of Human Limitations

Eccl. 1:16-18

1:16: “*I communed with my heart, saying, ‘Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.’*”: Concerning his next conclusion, the preacher begins by considering in his heart what God has given to him which he can use to accomplish this task. “It appears that here we find a sober reflection, almost a frustration. Here is a man who had outstripped all his forerunners and contemporaries in wisdom, and he knew it. And yet with all his wisdom and vast experience---he was failing to find meaning and happiness in this life” (Dunagan, pg. 10).

1:17-18: “And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”: He put all of his efforts to understand the difference and the benefits of both wisdom and madness. He applied his heart to wisdom—he was strategic in his approach. He also sought to know folly—he tried jumping in with both feet, taking in all he could to see if that would bring fulfillment, doing whatever he heart desired. But neither approach caused him to find true fulfillment. His conclusion was that the whole matter was useless and grasping for the wind. In fact, he found that the more he increased in wisdom the more sorrow also increased. Why? With his wisdom the Preacher was able to see the consequences of the works of life under the sun more clearly than any other man—He was able to see the end of the matter. Because of his great wisdom, of all people he was most able to see the futility and vanity of life under the sun.

Questions

Chapter One

7. What are the main points in chapter 1?
8. How does the author describe himself?
9. What is the theme of this book, as stated in verse 2?
10. What does phrase, “Vanity of vanities” mean?
11. What does the phrase, “under the sun” mean?
12. What illustrations are given to show the futility observed in the cycles of life?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
13. What is never satisfied?
14. Why is there nothing new under the sun?
15. Why do we think something is new?
16. In verse 13, what did the Preacher determine to do and why?
17. What did he conclude concerning the works under the sun? Why?
18. What had the preacher attained?
19. What did he set his heart to know?
20. What conclusion did he draw? Why?

Ecclesiastes

Chapter Two

The Search for Satisfaction

Eccl. 2:1-10

2:1: *“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure’; but surely, this also was vanity.”*: The preacher had great wisdom given to him by God (1:16). Here he has set out to use that wisdom to find some answers. There are many who fall headlong into mirth and pleasure; who foolishly waste themselves on these things so that they do themselves great harm in the process or do not remember the experience after it is over. Not so with the preacher. Neither did he live his life and then by chance happen to reflect back on his experiences. He had his goal set in mind before he even began. He determined to apply his heart to find answers. He intended to test the things that bring mirth and pleasure to men in order to see if anything can bring true fulfillment. But, *“this also is vanity.”* After applying all of his great wisdom to find the answer, all was useless for giving him fulfillment. There was no way a man can find fulfillment in life under the sun through mirth and pleasure.

2:2: *“I said of laughter – ‘Madness!’; and of mirth, ‘What does it accomplish?’”*: Laughter is madness? How so? We laugh because we are happy, but how long does it last? Only a moment, and then what? Does it satisfy us? Does it fulfill us? After we laugh, will that sustain us through the rest of our lives? No. Therefore it maddens because it is temporal. The same was found of mirth. What does it accomplish? In our modern world great emphasis is placed on recreation and vacation time; time to let-loose and fill ourselves with mirth. Yet how many people need a vacation from their vacation when it is over? How many people accomplish anything with their mirth? Nothing is accomplished by it. When next year comes around, last year’s vacation does not sustain us. Therefore it is vanity.

2:3: *“I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under the heaven all the days of their lives.”*: Here the preacher is showing how he came to the above conclusions. This was his method for testing his heart with mirth and pleasure. He did not jump in like a fool, but conducted his tests, *“while guiding my heart with wisdom.”* He applied wisdom to his test to see how to find just the right amount and means to gain the greatest fulfillment. *“Folly”* here would include all of the activities that men use to enjoy themselves. In this passage he is referring to the two kinds of tools that men generally use as fulfillment: substance and recreation. He sought to lay hold of it to see if man is capable of finding true fulfillment with these two things. Is there a point at which a man’s recreation will cause good in his life that can be stored up for tomorrow?

2:4: *“I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards.”*: After searching for substance or recreation for fulfillment, the preacher now turns his hand to earthly labors to see if that will bring true fulfillment. This is an occupation that a great segment of the human race has set forth to accomplish. Will a dream house make our lives complete? How about a house on a grand property with vineyards? When possessions and accomplishments have become great, then will a man be satisfied in his life under the sun?

2:5: “I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them.”: As king in Israel, The Preacher had great resources at his disposal. He did not stop with a grand house, but increased in everything that a man could have to bring satisfaction, including all kinds of fruit trees.

2:6: “I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.”: In order to have healthy and fruitful vineyards, orchards and gardens one needs a water source with which to water them. So, he built pools for irrigation.

2:7: “I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house, Yes I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.”: The work of caring for a large house and a large property and vineyards and orchards and gardens would be too great for just one man. So the preacher hired servants to care for his grand layout. With such an estate it would be necessary for his servant’s families to live on the property, therefore he must provide for that as well. Livestock would also be a necessary recourse for such a place. His property became so great that it was greater than any who came before him.

2:8: “I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds.”: To sustain such a grand property as illustrated above, much wealth would have been needed. As king, there was no lack of such wealth. Silver and gold was in abundance. He also brought in the pleasures of music and entertainment. He had the wealth and power to do all of these things.

2:9: “So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.”: He became greater than all kings before him in wealth, power, and abundance. Yet he did not lose his wisdom to arrogance or self conceit, as many of the overly rich tend to do. He remembered his original purpose for all of this, “to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under the sun” (1:13). Thus, he was able to accomplish all of these great works and still retain his wisdom. The wisdom to rule, to govern, and to discern whether or not his great accomplishment could truly bring satisfaction to his life.

2:10: “Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor”: He withheld nothing from himself that seemed good, but experienced all (with wisdom, not to excess) to see what could satisfy a man under the sun, if anything. He then set out to enjoy all that he had accomplished; to soak it in and give it opportunity to give him fulfillment.

The Temporary Nature of Human Wisdom Eccl. 2:11-17

2:11: “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled: And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.”: Having accumulated greatness in every way and given himself time and opportunity to enjoy all of his labors, he was ready to answer the question that spurred this quest—does a man profit from all of these great things? “What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” (Eccl. 1:3). His answer—“all was vanity and grasping for the wind.” Though he was able to enjoy the fruits of his labor, nothing profited him; nothing that he could store up to give him fulfillment later on. There was nothing in all of his labors that could fill him up and make his life complete. The lesson for us is to be content with such things as we have (Heb. 13:5). Not even the greatest king in Israel with all of his wealth and power could bring true

fulfillment with physical pleasure and grandeur. How much less can a person who is unable to even touch the wealth of the king attain such fulfillment? To even attempt it is vanity and grasping for the wind.

2:12: “Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do who succeeds the king? – Only what he has already done.”: There was no one that could go beyond what the king has done. He, with all of his riches, power, and wisdom, has tried to find fulfillment in his labors and was unable. He has done all that could be done. Any man after him that may have attempted to answer the same question was going to come to the same conclusions. For it has already been done. Therefore, rather than pursuing such vanity, let us learn from the preacher’s experience, the lesson that is to be learned—*“Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all”* (Eccl. 12:13).

2:13: “Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.”: There are men who pursue wisdom in their life, then there are those who pursue entertainment, laughter, pleasure. This is what he is referring to. One thing that he did learn in all of his searching was the benefits of wisdom over folly. In wisdom there is light, but those who only pursue folly (2:3) walk in darkness. Their life is empty and shallow.

2:14: “*The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all.*”: The wise man, using his wisdom, can determine which way he is going. In his wisdom he is able to see the consequences of his actions and decision. He is able to see the end of a matter. Thus, his eyes are where they are supposed to be—looking forward. But the fool does not see where he is going. He does not consider his steps to know where they lead him, therefore he is in darkness. Nevertheless, all men, wisdom and foolish alike, will face the same end—death.

2:15: “*So I said in my heart, ‘As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?’ Then I said in my heart, ‘This also is vanity.’*”: A wise man may walk in his wisdom and a fool in his folly, yet they both will die—the same thing happens to both so that it would seem that there is no benefit of wisdom over foolishness. Therefore, if this earthly life is all we are considering, both wisdom and foolishness are vanities because there is not earthly benefit for either one.

2:16: “For there is no more remembrance of wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool!”: Some may reason, “But wise men are remembered for their greatness.” To some extent, this may be true. However, there are a number of fools that have been remembered throughout history as well. But how much of their lives are truly remembered? What is remembered about them? How much of that brings profit to the man himself? Nil. Nothing. None. The fool will die and be forgotten, and so will the wise man. So what is the benefit of being wise?

2:17: “Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.”: Of all the work that he did under the sun, there was nothing that would bring him fulfillment, therefore he hated all of his work, for he was unable to retain any of it. Anything that would be left after his death would be left to another man, but how would he know whether or not that man would be a fool?

The Vanity of Saving For Posterity Eccl. 2:18-21

2:18: “Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.”: In this section the Preacher expounds on the statement made in the previous verse. The preacher accumulated great wisdom, great wealth, great power, but who was to get those things when he was gone? None of that was going to do the preacher any good after he was dead. He labored and toiled under the sun and accumulated great wealth, but in the end he had to give it all up. When he died he didn’t get to keep any of it. Rather than bring him fulfillment in this life, he was forced to leave it to those who would come after him. That was a depressing thought, therefore he said he hated all of his labor.

2:19: “And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.”: To some, leaving their wealth for their children is a great purpose in life. But children often squabble over the wealth of their parents. There is no guarantee that our labors will truly benefit future generations. It doesn’t last. Therefore it is vanity for one to labor so that other generations can enjoy the fruits of that labor. It brings no fulfillment to the present generation and is wasted by future generations.

2:20: “Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun.”: For the above reason, all of the great things accumulated by the preacher, rather than bringing him fulfillment, brought him grief. He hated all of the works that he had done because it brought him despair.

2:21: “For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.”: It grieved the Preacher to have to leave his wealth to future generations. The same thing happened in America with the transition from the Great Depression times to WWII era to the baby boomers to what some refer to as “generation X.” One generation knew extreme poverty then next generation worked hard, the following generation took their parent’s blessings for granted, then the generation after that was trained up in the carelessness of their parents. Therefore, what did all of the labors of the Depression and WWII generation benefit their children? Nothing. This is a constant cycle throughout history. It is vanity. Saving for posterity may be a priority for some, but it will never bring them fulfillment in life under the sun and may even further displace future generations from genuine wisdom.

A Glimpse of Hope Eccl. 2:22-26

2:22: “For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun?”: In light of the vanity described above, the preacher asked, what is a man to do with all of his labors if not store it up for his posterity? Why does a man labor? What is he supposed to get from all of his labors?

2:23: “For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.”: A man that worries about his business and can’t sleep because of his concern for all of his wealth is pursuing vanity. He labors for riches but is unable to enjoy his riches for anxiety over them. What he is to do? How can he benefit from all of his labors?

2:24: “Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.”: One cannot store up profit from his

labors to bring fulfillment. One cannot take fulfillment in leaving his wealth to posterity. One cannot benefit from his labors when he is too busy worrying about what will happen. So what is he to do? The conclusion made by the preacher is that a man should enjoy the fruits of his labors today. Take joy in the works of his hands today, while it is with him and while he can appreciate it. This is God's gift to man. This is what God intended for a man to enjoy in this life. God did not intend for man to find eternal fulfillment in life under the sun. Neither did He intend for man's works to endure forever under the sun. A man is meant to labor and then enjoy the fruits of his labor and to remember that it is a gift from God.

Be not mistaken. This passage is not teaching the philosophy of "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die". It is not teaching us to be careless. Rather, it teaching us to not be anxious over our earthly possessions, for to do so is striving after the wind (Luke 12:13-21). Rather, the best we can expect in this life is to enjoy the gifts that God has blessed us with today. But concerning fulfillment, seek the Lord, not earthly fulfillment.

2:25: "For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?": Does anyone doubt the above conclusion? Consider, who has had more wealth, more power, more wisdom to enjoy all of his labors under the sun than the king? Of all people, is he is the one best suited to teach this lesson.

2:26: "For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.": God is the one who gives increase. He is the one who gives the ability to enjoy. It stands to reason then that the only true source of fulfillment is God. Therefore, if we want happiness, we must do good in the sight of God. Concerning this verse, some may point out that there are plenty of foolish and sinful people who have great wealth in this life, while there are a great many righteous people who are poor and who are forced to do the work of "gathering and collecting" (Luke 16). So how can the words of the preacher be true? It is true because he is not talking about the amount of wealth; he is not saying that the righteous will be rich and the sinful will be poor. Rather, notice what he says, "For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy..." Who is able to appreciate the blessings of this life more than the man who turns his heart toward God? A righteous man and a sinner of equal wealth may look the same on the outside, but the righteous man is able to enjoy the fruit of his labor because his heart is set on God and not on a worldly pursuit. The sinner, on the other hand, is so consumed with seeking earthly fulfillment that he is too anxious over his wealth to appreciate what he has today. For that reason, a poor righteous man is able to have greater joy than a rich fool (Prov. 15:16; 16:18; 19:1; Prov. 28:6).

Questions

Chapter 2

1. In his search, what sort of things did the preacher explore?
2. What guided his earth during the course of his search?
3. What things did he accumulate during his search?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
 - g.
4. How great did he become? What stayed with him?
5. What was his reaction to this great accumulation of wealth?
6. What conclusions were drawn about the value of wisdom and folly?
 - a.
 - b.
7. What did this reflection lead him to do? Why?
 - a.
 - b.
8. What else cause his to hate his labor?
9. What did he conclude was the result of one's labor, striving, and toiling under the sun?
10. What did he say was the best a man could achieve?
11. But who was capable of achieving this?
12. What did the sinner receive? For what purpose?

Ecclesiastes

Chapter Three

They Tyranny of Time

Eccl. 3:1-8

3:1: “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:” There are several things in life that do not change; things that happen in their season will continue to happen in life under the sun. Every person must consider these things and adjust their life to deal with them, for they will not change to fit a person’s life.

3:2: “A time to be born, and a time to die; And a time to pluck what is planted;” This is not talking about predestination. This is simply talking about birth in general. Birth is something that occurs invariably in this life. At the same time, death occurs invariably. Just as a person rejoices in birth, so they must learn to deal with death. The same is true in the plant world as well as the human. Seeds are planted in their season and harvested in their season.

3:3: “A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;” According to Gen. 9:6 there is a time to put a man to death, but under different circumstances there is a time for men to be healed. There is a time to build up, but there also comes a time when old buildings must be torn down in order to make room for the new.

3:4: “A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;” Every person weeps in their lifetime, but they also laugh when the time is appropriate (Rom. 12:15). There is a time to mourn, but a person will not mourn all the time, for there are other experiences that give him/her reason to rejoice. Each thing comes at its appropriate time, but neither one lasts forever.

3:5-8: “A time to cast away stones, and a time gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; A time to tear, and a time sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.” Everything that happens throughout one’s life happens in its own time. It is a recurring theme from generation to generation; it cannot be changed. Yet men tend to want to be in control of their lives. If one is going to find any kind of happiness, however, he must come to realize that he does nothing more than react to the seasons of life. The nation that pursues peace must at some point find itself preparing for war. A person who strives to cast away stones from his field is later found gathering stones for a fence or a walkway. Thus, the Preacher cites fourteen different connections to illustrate this repetitious and irresistible cycle of life under the sun. No matter how hard he tries, man can do nothing to break this cycle. This world was not made for the individual. It is set in its own cycle and man is expected to adapt and “go with the flow.” Only when he learns to adjust to the seasons rather than fight them will he be able to enjoy the blessings of this life.

The God Given Task

Eccl. 3:9-15

3:9: “What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?” This is the same question raised in 1:3. The Preacher answered the question once before in 1:11, “And there was no profit under the sun.” A man

pursues pleasure, but once he has been filled with that pleasure, will he be happy? No. He will grow tired of it and want something else. A man becomes rich, will he be happy then? No. He will spend his nights awake worrying about his riches or thinking about how to gain more. If a man gives up his riches and becomes poor, will that make him happy? No. So what profit does a man have from all of his labors? What use are they for making him feel fulfilled in this life? This is the question at hand.

3:10-11: “I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in is time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.”: A man is bound to the times and seasons of life under the sun. He is aware of the idea of eternity, but he cannot fully comprehend it. He knows it exists, but he cannot wrap his mind around an existence without the measurement of times and seasons. Therefore, there is a question that itches at the back of every person’s mind. Whether he is an atheist or a Christian, a man still wonders what will happen when this life is over. He can only affect the world around him in the seventy or so years that he lives on the earth, but then he is finished. He cannot change the past and He cannot determine the future. He will never know all of the works that God has done from the beginning. He will never know all the works that God will do in the future. Though he has an awareness of eternity, he will only ever know what happens within his own lifetime. How can one find happiness in such a life? He cannot change the past or determine the future, so what is he to do?

3:12-13: “I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor – it is the gift of God.”: Since the works of a man are limited to several years on this earth, though he is aware of eternity, he must determine the best way to spend those few years in order to get the most out of them. Through his searching the Preacher concludes that a man ought to do good in his life. He may not be able to comprehend eternity, but at least he can live in light of it. Rather than wasting his short time under the sun trying to search out things which he cannot know or attain, it is best for a man to rejoice in the good things within his reach. Of all of his labors and in all his wisdom, there was only one thing that the Preacher found that gave him happiness in this life, to “eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor.” He is not saying that a man should live a carefree life. Rather, it is good for a man to work hard and then take time to enjoy the fruits of those labors while they last. He doesn’t know what will be in eternity, therefore enjoy this life and make himself ready for whatever will come.

3:14: “I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.”: This is another truth that helps us contemplate God in this life. At some point, a man must realize that this world was not made for him. Yes he lives on the earth and enjoys the things of creation, but when he is gone the earth will continue on for generations to come. God created the world and man can do nothing to add to God’s creation, nor can he take from it. God placed man in this kind of existence so that he might acknowledge his own insignificance and turn his eyes to God and learn to fear Him on the earth. “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27).

3:15: “That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.”: This is essentially how history operates. Just as in chapter one, history is a continuous cycle. There were people in generations past that experienced the same things as the present generation, and so it will be in the future. What mat must understand is that whatever he chooses to do

with the short time he is allotted in the cycle of history, he is going to have to give an account of his actions and the works which he does under the sun.

Injustice Seems to Prevail

Eccl. 3:16-22

3:16: “Moreover I saw under the sun: In the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there.”: In his examination of the vanities of life, this is yet another observation that the Preacher made. In the places where one would expect justice and righteousness to be, the Preacher found wickedness and iniquity instead. Courts are going to be corrupted, judges will be bribed, and though it should not be that way, it is the same in every generation (Isa. 5:20).

3:17: “*I said in my hearts, ‘God shall judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.’*”: There is a time for judgment. Even though judgments of men are often unjust and full of iniquity, there will also be a time when those things will be rectified. Again, the Preacher is showing that certain things happen from generation to generation. A man who is seeking happiness can fret and worry over what happens under the sun, or he can do his work before God, take note of the vanities of men, and then move on.

3:18: “*I said in my heart, ‘Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals.’*”: The Preacher begins to see why the world is the way it is. Many have asked why God made the world the way He did; why He allows evil to continue under the sun. The Preacher answers that question here. God is proving mankind; putting us to the test as to whether or not we will hear what He has to say. The process of testing one whose eyes are turned to God will always make him better. Just as gold is purified, so God is purifying the sons of men. Those who look to Him in their lives under the sun will be purified. But if we remove God from the picture, if all there is is this life, then from that perspective man is no different from the animals. The Preacher explains why in the next verse.

3:19-21: “For what happens to animals; one thing befalls them; as one dies, so does the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all return to dust. Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?”: Man and animal are made of the same material. A man is born just as an animal is born, he dies just as the animal dies, and they both turn into dust. For that reason, what does it matter if a creature is a man with all of his riches or the dog that eats out of the garbage can? In order to understand the point here the reader must remember the purpose of the book of Ecclesiastes. It is to teach us the vanities of life under the sun without God. If all we look at and if all we value is this physical life, then we are no different than a dog. We live and then we die. Without God there is no knowledge of what happens to our life force, whether it goes up or down. Without God it makes no difference. But remember the conclusion the Preacher is leading us to in Eccl. 12:13.

3:22: “So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?”: With all of the vanities of life, with the constant cycle that every man is made to experience, there is only one thing that is worth living for if there is no God—to enjoy the fruit of one’s labor. That is as good as it gets. Once again, the Preacher is tearing away the glamour of life under the sun.

Questions

Chapter T hree

1. What does the Preacher say about everything under heaven?
2. List some examples of how he illustrates “a time for every purpose.”
3. What question does the Preacher restate?
4. What four things has he seen?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
5. What does the Preacher conclude is best for people to do? Why?
6. Why has God made what He does unchangeable?
7. What will God require?
8. As the Preacher looked in places where there should have been judgment and righteousness, what did he see?
9. What did he reason in his heart about this?
10. What did he tell himself was the reason God allowed such things?
11. What does man have in common with beasts?
12. What is different between man and beast?
13. What did the Preacher perceive was best for man to do?

Ecclesiastes

Chapter Four

Tears of the Oppressed

Eccl. 4:1-3

4:1: “Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, but they have no comforter – on the side of their oppressors there is power, but they have no comforter.”: Returning back to his discussion in Eccl. 3:22, the Preacher now traces out another line of thought from that one. On the earth, just as there was sinfulness in the place of judgment and iniquity in the place of righteousness, so the innocent are oppressed with no comfort. This has been true throughout history. It seems that those who have the most power on earth are the oppressors. The innocent and the righteous are oppressed by the unjust and sinful.

4:2: “Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, More than the living who are still alive.”: Because of the above evil, if all we are looking at is life under the sun, then those who are dead are better off because they no longer have to deal with such great injustice.

4:3: “Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.”: Along the same line of thought, if all we are looking at is life under the sun, the only person who has it better than the one who is dead is the one who has never been born. Only he has never had to deal with the great iniquity, injustice, and oppression that happen to men upon the earth.

The Vanity of Selfish Toil

Eccl. 4:4-8

4:4: “Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.”: It is honorable and good to be hard working and skillful at whatever we do. But even with such success comes hardship, for invariably others will envy our success. With envy always comes strife (James 3:14-15). Therefore, those who enjoy great success will have to endure the grumbling from those who are less successful; of those who become bitter because they feel that they should deserve that same level of success. For this reason, if a man seeks fulfillment in success, he will never find it because even success brings its own set of troubles. So what is a man to do? Is it better to endure the hardships of success, or to avoid it by refusing to work? See the next verse.

4:5: “The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh.”: Success may bring some troubles, but laziness is even worse. The man who refuses to work will ultimately fade away. If he does not starve from lack of food, he will become financially destitute and ultimately his life will be consumed for he has no labor to sustain him in life under the sun.

4:6: “Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.”: The previous two verses describe the extremes of success and failure. The very successful man must endure envy and strife of others and the lazy man wastes away in his poverty. In this verse, the Preacher is saying that there is a middle ground which allows a man to get the most out of this life. A “handful with quietness” refers to the man who has just what he needs to get by in this life. If one handful represents having

all that one needs, then “both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind” represents over-reaching, seeking luxuries and having more than what is necessary to get by in this life. But as we learned in Eccl. 4:4, such excess only brings excess hardship. A person may work and strive and endure great hardship to increase his wealth, but to do so is to strive after the wind. To over-reach in order to find happiness in great success is as vain as trying to catch the wind. Therefore, it is better to have one handful with the peace and quite than to endure the hardship that comes with excess. If God blesses one with wealth, be happy with that rather than trying to always increase more and more. If God blesses one with a common life with everything he needs without excess, then be happy with that and enjoy the peace that comes with such a life. “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

4:7: “Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun.”: The Preacher “returned” in that he brought his mind back to his initial question in order to pursue another train of thought.

4:8: “There is one alone, without companion: he has neither son nor brother. Yet there is no end to *all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, ‘For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?’ This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.*”: The Preacher considers the man who is without family and companions in this life. Some may see it as a blessing to be alone, to not have to worry about someone else, to not have to deal with the conflicts that come with relationships, to not have to answer for anyone or put anyone else before themselves. But the Preacher observes the vanity of such loneliness. If a person has no one who is close to him, then why does he labor and toil? What good is it to deprive one’s self in order to gain riches when he has no one to share it with, no one to care for, and no one to rejoice with in his success? A man may toil and labor and for a moment be glad in his success, but that is quickly overshadowed with the feeling of loneliness. Then he realizes he has no true wealth in his life; nothing to truly make him happy. Therefore, to pursue such a life is “vanity and a grave misfortune.”

The Value of a Friend

Eccl. 4:9-12

4:9: “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.”: In contrast to the individual described above, the Preacher expounds on the blessings of having a companion. Even though a man be rich, nothing can make him as happy as a companion. Two people, though they be poor, are better off than the lonely rich man. The Preacher explains his reasoning in the next few verses.

4:10-12: “For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”: These are the blessings of having a companion. It is true that even companionship has its low points. People disagree, they have personality conflicts, and they get tired of one another from time to time. Thus the old adage, “Familiarity breeds contempt” (Unknown). But the blessings of having a companion far outweigh the difficulties. A man who is alone may not have to consider other people’s feelings when making decisions, but neither will he have anyone to help him up when he falls, keep him warm when he is cold, or help to fight off enemies when they come. In life, companions are more valuable than riches. The man who finds any kind of happiness in this life is going to be the one who has friends and learns to be a friend to others.

Popularity Passes Away

Eccl. 4:13-16

4:13: “Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.”: It is often the case with men who rise to power that they begin to trust in their own strength and become puffed up in their popularity. Eventually, such overconfidence begins to erode their strength and power. They become foolish in their arrogance. The end of their days is hard and toilsome because they will no longer hear wisdom. The proverbs spend much time discussing the foolishness of one who will not hear correction and instruction. The conclusion that is made concerning such men is this, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). Therefore, a young man, though he may not have the power and popularity of a king, is far better than a king who will no longer be instructed. The wise young man is one who acknowledges his own ignorance and weaknesses and seeks instruction that he may grow. Therefore he is the better one, for when we cease to learn and grow we begin to die.

4:14: “For he comes out of prison to be king, although he was born poor in his kingdom. I saw all the living who walk under the sun; they were with the second youth who stands in his place.”: We may not be certain as to who exactly the preacher is referring to here, but it is true that every old king must have at some point been under a tutor. Even though he was royalty as a child, he was as a servant in his kingdom, forced to heed the instructions of his tutors and caretakers (compare Gal. 4:1, 2). A king who no longer hears instruction is foolish because he ignores all that he was taught before he became king. He also forgets from where he has come, that there was one who was king before him, and in like manner he will be replaced by another.

4:16: “There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king; yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.”: Kings become foolish because of their overconfidence in their own power. But they forget their place on this earth. They feel as if they are the greatest, yet when the time comes they will be replaced and whatever sense of greatness they may have attained will be lost. For this reason, it is foolish for any man to strive for worldly standards of greatness and popularity. Kings are the greatest of all men, for they rule over men, but even kings are forgotten. Therefore, no man can find fulfillment in their own greatness. The greatness of men does not last. It will be replaced by another. The higher they reach in popularity, the greater their fall when all is gone. Therefore it is vanity and striving after the wind to seek fulfillment in the greatness of kings. If we want to be happy in this life, we must learn to be content with what God has given us and always seek to gain wisdom from those around us.

Questions

Chapter Four

1. What were the main points in this chapter?
2. What did the Preacher observe regarding oppression?
3. What did this observation prompt the Preacher to do?
4. What did he observe about toil and skillful work?
5. How does he describe the fool who doesn't work?
6. What is better than both hands full, but with toil and grasping for the wind?
7. What is described as vanity and a grave misfortune?
8. How does the Preacher illustrate the value of friendship?
9. How does the Preacher illustrate the vanity of popularity?

Ecclesiastes

Chapter Five

Insufficiencies of Human Religion

Eccl. 5:1-7

5:1: “Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.”: In Solomon’s day, the temple was also known as the house of God. That was where God’s chosen people went, both to offer sacrifices and to hear the priests teach from the law of Moses. According to the Preacher’s instruction, when one goes to the house of God it is better to learn and to consider instruction and wisdom than to offer sacrifices without thinking about what one is doing. Fools are quick to act, but they do not think through what they are doing. They are eager to do things in the service of God but fail to consider if what they are doing is really pleasing to God. Therefore, it is better to listen to the teaching of God to hear what He wants, rather than to do evil by carelessly offering the traditional sacrifices of fools.

5:2: “Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few.”: Think before you speak. God is listening. Men will be required to give an account of every idle word (Matt. 12:36). When one is angry, let him not speak from his anger lest he speak evil against God: I.e., “God why me?” As James instructed, “Be swift to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath” (James 1:19). And in the Proverbs, “He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, but he who is impulsive exalts folly” (Prov. 14:29).

5:3: “***For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool’s voice is known by his many words.***”: Generally, when there are many things on a man’s mind it will affect his dreams. Therefore, when a man’s dreams are many, you know he has many things on his mind. He is full of stress and anxiety. In like manner, we can know a fool by his many words. The fool is the one who talks too much without taking time to hear and learn. When we become preoccupied with our own thoughts and desires, then we make ourselves fools before God and men.

5:4: “When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed— ”: In Num. 30:2 God gave a law concerning vows. In Deut. 23:21 He expounds on that principle. These passages show the great importance God places on fulfilling our commitments. Just as God keeps His vows, so we must keep our vows. There is no sin in not vowing, but if we do make a vow to God (promising to do something, promising to give something to the Lord—see 1 Sam. 1:9-20), then we must make haste to keep that vow. Christians today ought to consider this very carefully, since obedience to the gospel is in effect a vow to serve God in righteousness (Rom. 6:19). Marriage is another such vow which men today often fail to keep. If we owe something, bankruptcy is not an option. “Pay what you have vowed.”

5:5: “Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.”: Many are tempted to say things like, “If I had . . . , then I would . . .” But how do we know what we would do with what we do not already have? It is better to not make vows, than to make a vow and find out that we cannot keep it. “*Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes*”

away. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.' But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil" (James 4:13-16).

5:6: "Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, nor say before the messenger of God that it was an error. Why should God be angry at your excuse and destroy the work of your hands?": By making rash vows with our mouths, we may force our entire bodies to sin when we are unable to meet the commitment. If we make excuses for not fulfilling our commitments, we make ourselves fools in the sight of God. God knows the hearts of men. "We live in a society in which forgiveness is viewed as something easily obtained. Even Christians can develop the attitude that they can go ahead and sin deliberately and then simply ask for forgiveness. But forgiveness has conditions and one of them is genuine repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10). After such a deliberate sin, you may not be able to manifest such repentance! If our heart isn't contrite then God won't forgive us simply because we mouthed the words, 'please forgive me' in some prayer" (Dunagan). See Hebrews 10:26-31.

5:7: "For in the multitude of dreams and many words there is also vanity. But fear God.": People dream much and say much, but their dreams are often worthless and their words empty (see James 4:13-16). Men often boast about future plans, but when those plans fall through, their boasting labels them as fools (Luke 14:28-30). Such is the man who says he will pay back his friend once he wins a gamble, but then he never wins. Dreaming does not accomplish anything, and neither does cheap talk. A fool is known by his many words (Prov. 29:20). When we approach God, He does not take joy in many words given without thought (Matt. 6:7). He does not concern Himself with the worthless dreams of human reasoning (Jer. 23:28-29). We do not know the future. Therefore, to make bold claims about what we do not know is worthless. If we want God to think highly of us and to hear our prayers and petitions, we must learn to turn our hearts to Him. Trust in Him not our own dreams (Prov. 3:5) and listen to Him with a spirit of meekness. "...let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak..." (James 1:19).

The Vanity of Riches

Eccl. 5:8-17

5:8: "If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province, do not marvel at the matter; for high official watches over high official, and higher officials are over them.": Rulers and leaders are charged with executing justice and keeping peace. Yet, instead, many who have worldly authority and power to execute justice end up using their power to pervert justice. In so doing, injustice spreads and violence, rather than peace, is the result. Though this seems backwards, the Preacher says not to be surprised by the matter. There are varying levels authority among men, but above all of them there is a Judge to whom they must give an account for their injustice—God is over all. He will bring all men into account for their actions done under the sun (Eccl. 12:14). We must keep in mind that human authorities and dignitaries are fallible and, therefore, subject to the same mistakes as the rest of mankind. But God is infallible. He is the One in whom we must trust (Rom. 3:4).

5:9: "Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field.": All men share the same source of food, kings and paupers alike. The common man eats fruit from the same earth as the king. During a famine, the king experiences loss just as the poor man does. The king may take from the hands of the poor in order to feed his own belly, but eventually he too will feel the same loss as everyone else. God is the One who controls their source of well-being. "...for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). All men are equally dependant upon God for their daily sustenance. If we want fulfillment, rather than seeking it in the abundance of goods, let us seek it from the ultimate source.

5:10: “He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.”: The poor often wish for more, but when they receive more, it is still not enough. Man is not satisfied with any amount of wealth. Even those who are already rich labor and toil to gain more riches. Enough is never enough. If a man’s treasure is in earthly riches then he will pursue it until the day he dies, but he will take none of it beyond the grave. Therefore the pursuit of riches is vanity.

5:11: “When goods increase, they increase who eat them; so what profit have the owners except to see them with their eyes?”: What use is it for a man to become excessively rich? What if he owns five mansions? How many can he sleep in at a time? What if he owns 2000 horses? How many can he ride at a time? Therefore the only benefit of having an abundance of possessions is simply to look at them. Also, invariably, as a man’s possessions increase, so do the people he must pay to care for them. Therefore, even though a man’s wealth increases, he must give it away to those who care for his possessions. There are a few rich people who eventually come to understand this. They realize that there is nothing more they can do with their riches expect to provide jobs for other people. So that becomes their unrealized goal.

5:12: “The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.”: There is a benefit of not having an abundance of riches. A laboring man works hard during the day, and in the evening his body is tired. Even if he is too poor to have a feast when his work is done, his body will rest well because of his labor. That man’s rest will be sweet. On the other hand, the rich man’s sleep is bitter, for he is too worried about his riches to enjoy the comfort his expensive bed.

5:13-14: “There is a severe evil which I have seen under the sun: Riches kept for their owner to his hurt. But those riches perish through misfortune; when he begets a son, there is nothing in his hand”:

What does a man do who worries about his great riches? He seeks ways to invest that money so that it may continue to increase. Nevertheless, at some point in his life, he makes bad investments and loses his money. Since his joy is in his wealth, when he loses his wealth he loses his perceived joy. Then, when it is time for that man to give an inheritance to his children, he has nothing left to give them.

5:15-16: “*As he came from his mother’s womb, naked shall he return, to go as he came; and he shall take nothing from his labor which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a severe evil—just exactly as he came, so shall he go. And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?*”: Even if a man does not lose his wealth through misfortune, he will lose it at his death. There is nothing that he can take to his grave; nothing of all of his labor under the sun will profit him (Eccl. 1:3).

5:17: “All his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger.”: Because of the eventuality describe above, a man who seeks fulfillment in the abundance of riches spends his life in darkness, seeking happiness where it cannot be found and fulfillment where there is only emptiness. He labors, toils, suffers and worries. Yet for all of his sorrow, in the end he will have nothing to show for it.

Meaningful Labor Remembers God Eccl. 5:18-20

5:18: “Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.”: Up to this point the Preacher has discussed the things that are not good for a man to do. Here, he points out something that will benefit a man in his life under the sun. First, it is good for a man to

work hard, and then take the time to enjoy the fruit of his labor, for the fruit of a man's labor is God's gift to him.

5:19: "As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it, to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor—this is the gift of God.": The Preacher's conclusion is that the man who is rich is no better than the man who is poor. Whatever we have is the gift of God. If we have the ability to enjoy the fruit of our labor then that is the greatest gift we can attain in life under the sun, regardless of how much or how little we have. Happiness and fulfillment cannot be found in the abundance of riches, but in how one uses his wealth before God. Those who are truly happy are the ones who rejoice in the Lord (regardless of their physical state), for He is the source of all good things. "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim. 5:17-19).

5:20: "For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.": The man who learns to acknowledge God in this life will not waste his time and energy in vain pursuits. He will have joy because he is serving the Lord. In the Lord he will learn the true meaning of happiness and fulfillment. "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21).

Questions

Chapter Five

1. What are the main points for this chapter?
2. How should one conduct himself while worshiping God?
3. What two principles concerning vows are given by the Preacher?
4. Why should we not marvel when we see oppression, and perversion of justice and righteousness?
5. Why is it vanity to love riches?
6. What is a frequent consequence of having an abundance of wealth?
7. What is described as “a severe evil under the sun”?
8. What does the preacher see as good and fitting for one to do?
9. What is described as “the gift of God”?
10. Why will a person blessed by God not dwell unduly on the days of his life?

Lesson Six

Ecclesiastes Chapter Six

The Vanity of Unenjoyed Wealth

Eccl. 6:1-6

6:1: “There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:”. In Eccl. 5:18-19 the Preacher concludes that there is nothing better than for a man to enjoy the fruit of his labor. A man who has wealth and power enough to do that has a great blessing in deed. This conclusion puts wealth in a good light. In this chapter, the Preacher expounds on some of its negative aspects. Though some good can come from riches, there is also “an evil” that is “common among men” which often accompanies them.

6:2: “A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.”: It is an evil thing for a man to have wealth but not the ability to enjoy that wealth. What sort of man is not able to enjoy his wealth? The Preacher has already mentioned such a man in Eccl. 2:26; 5:10. For there are many rich in this world who do not look to God as the source of their wealth. This is “common among men” (Eccl. 6:1). Those who do not acknowledge God seek fulfillment in the increase of their riches, but they will never find it—it is vanity (Eccl. 2:11). Such a man may work hard and gain great riches, but he will never be satisfied with what he has attained; he will never truly learn to appreciate his wealth the way God intended. “...there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches” (Eccl. 4:8; 1:8).

6:3: “If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better than he—”: Here the Preacher illustrates how vain the life of a man is when he does not learn to appreciate God’s gift. Such a man could live a long life and have many children, but because he is never satisfied with riches and never acknowledges God, he is never truly able to appreciate what he has in life. Therefore, his life is worthless. It is better for a person to die at birth than to endure the life of that foolish rich man.

6:4-5: “for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness. 5 Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man.”: Both the rich man and the stillborn go to the same place, but at least the stillborn does not have to suffer through the vanity of life before he dies. The rich man, on the other hand would have to endure great amount of sorrow and heartache for nothing.

6:6: “even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?”: It does not matter how long a man lives, if he does not learn to put life in the proper perspective or acknowledge God in his life, he will have died in vain. While the stillborn would have only taken a couple of steps to reach his resting place, the foolish rich man would have to climb mountains and traverse deserts with sorrow, heartache, and pain to get to the same place. Why? Because he never learned to use his wealth the way God intended. Therefore the stillborn is better off than he.

The Vanity of Human Wisdom

Eccl. 6:7-9

6:7: “All the labor of man is for his mouth, and yet the soul is not satisfied.”: Most people work in order to satisfy the needs of their physical body, but they devote none of their resources to fulfilling spiritual needs (compare 1 Tim. 6:17-19). According to human wisdom, the only reason we earn money is to satisfy the flesh. Yet, if that is how we approach life, then we will never be fulfilled.

6:8: “For what more has the wise man than the fool? What does the poor man have, who knows how to walk before the living?”: If all we care about in this life is our physical appetites, then what sets the wise man apart from the fool? Physically they are the same. If a poor man is wise, what does he have that the rich fool doesn't? There is no difference.

6:9: “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.”: Once we satisfy one desire we turn to pursue another. Therefore, we are never fully satisfied. “The grass is always greener in somebody else's yard” (unknown). The Preacher's point is that it is better for us keep our eyes fixed on what we have than to seek the grass on the other side of the fence (bigger home, better car, a different spouse, etc.). If we do not, then every time we enter a new field, our eyes will wander to the next. We will never be satisfied if we spend our life wondering after our desires. Therefore the apostle Paul said, “...for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content” (Phil. 4:11). Likewise, all are commanded, “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. *For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'*” (Heb. 13:5). Learn to enjoy and to be thankful for the things that you have; i.e., “the sight of the eyes.”

The Limitations of Human Wisdom

Eccl. 6:10-12

6:10: “Whatever one is, he has been named already, for it is known that he is man; and he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he.”: God made man the way he is. Some are rich, some are poor. Some may change their physical status in life, but ultimately God is in control. Therefore, if we are not content with such things as we have, then we will find ourselves contending with God. He gives and takes away, not us. We may struggle against His providence, but to do so is vanity. Therefore be content with what He has given you.

6:11: “Since there are many things that increase vanity, How is man the better?”: Many things that men pursue are vain, for they don't add anything to his worth. How did going to the moon, inventing the atom bomb, and building majestic cities make mankind better than he already is? They didn't. Was the rich man better than Lazarus? No.

6:12: “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?”: What does man know about what is good? Is not God the one who created man? Is not God the one who created the world? So who are we to tell God that what we have is not good enough? How do we know what is going to happen on earth after we are gone? We do not know, but God does. Therefore trust in the Lord and learn to live with what He knows is good (Prov. 3:5-7; Rom. 8:28).

Questions

Lesson Six

1. What are the main points of this chapter?
2. What does the Preacher see as a common affliction among men?
3. How is a stillborn child better than who suffers such an affliction?
4. What is satisfied by all the labors of man?
5. What is better than the wandering of desire?
6. What is unchangeable about man?
7. Why is man no better by accumulating riches alone?
8. What is man unable (without help from God) to determine?

Lesson Seven

Ecclesiastes Chapter Seven

Wisdom Learned From Death

Eccl. 7:1-4

7:1: “A *good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one’s birth*.”: In the previous chapters, the Preacher showed that wealth does not bring happiness, laughter and folly do not bring fulfillment, and popularity will not remain with a man beyond the grave. What is left for a man to pursue after he has spent his energy seeking after these things? This is the question asked in Eccl. 6:12, “For who knows what is good for a man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow?” Though a man cannot find fulfillment in this “vain life” there is a right way and a wrong way to live. Thus, starting in this chapter, the Preacher gives tidbits of information to help us get the most out of this life.

Ointment was desirable because the arid climate had a tendency to dry out the skin. Precious ointment could be very costly. Here the Preacher is not making reference to its cost, however, but to its worth—what use is it? Ointment was for enjoyment and comfort, but the Preacher had already pointed out that enjoyment and comfort could not bring fulfillment. A good name, on the other hand, can make life much easier and is, therefore, of great worth than ointment. That is, a man’s reputation is of greater importance and accomplishes greater good for a man in this life than precious ointment. Likewise, birth is something that many people rejoice in. Conversely, most people mourn in the day that a person dies. Very few people rejoice in such a time. Here, the Preacher is not telling us that we should rejoice in the day of death. Rather, that there is more worth in that day, just like a good name is of more worth to a man’s life than precious ointment. Why? See vs. 2

7:2: “Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart.”: The Preacher shows that the day of death is of greater worth to a person’s life because when we go to the house of mourning we are forced to consider the end of our own lives. Most people know that they are going to die, but emotionally they do not often dwell on it. But, when we are confronted with the death of another it often causes us to consider the inevitable end of our own lives both emotionally and rationally. Faced with that reality, it causes us to think about what is really important; it helps us to put our own lives into focus.

7:3: “Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better.”: Laughter and enjoyment are fun, but they cause the heart to be careless. A sad countenance, on the other hand, causes a man to dwell on what is important. The heart is made better by a sad countenance because it causes a person to reflect, to consider his life, and to direct his heart toward things of greater value than mirth and pleasure which very often are a waste of time.

7:4: “The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.”: The wise man, whose eyes are in the right place (Eccl. 2:14), understands that death is what makes this life meaningful. He understands that the only way to truly appreciate life is to appreciate death. The fool is caught up in laughter and pleasure but never considers the meaning of his life or how to make his life the best it can be. Only when we acknowledge that our lives will eventually end will we learn to appreciate

the time we have and learn to make the most of it. Thus, the Preacher is showing that man's purpose in life is not to lengthen his days or to gain the most riches, but to make the most with the time God gives him under the sun. Live life in light of eternity.

Other Wise Sayings

Eccl. 7:5-14

7:5: "It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.": If we understand that life has a purpose, then we will acknowledge that the wise man is the one who will be able to help us find that purpose. In his wisdom, he will remind us that there is a God whom we must answer to when this life is over (Eccl. 3:15; 12:14). His rebuke will help our egos to subside so that we can learn to walk humbly before God. It will train us and steer us toward the path that is most profitable. It will make a better person out of us. The song of fools, however, is one of carelessness and frivolity. It does not consider God, nor does it teach anything. It merely exalts the vanities of life and blinds one to reality.

7:6: "For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool This also is vanity.": When thorns are burned they crackle loudly, but they produce little heat. Therefore they are worthless for boiling a pot of water or cooking a meal. Likewise, the laughter of fools is loud and sounds fun, but it is worthless.

7:7: "*Surely oppression destroys a wise man's reason, and a bribe debases the heart.*": Oppression and hardship can befit a person if properly used (see vs. 1-6). Yet, every good thing can potentially be harmful if used improperly. The word for oppression in this verse is fraud, unjust, or extortion. The rebuke of a wise man is often received with respect by those seeking to grow. But, there have been wise men in the past that have used their influence to do evil. Eventually, even the wisest person, if he resorts to oppressing others, will become a fool. A person who takes bribes to pervert justice will always be looking behind his shoulder; always worrying as to whether or not he successfully covered his tracks. Such constant guilt will erode the heart and ruin a man.

7:8: "The end of a thing is better than the beginning; the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.": "Patience is a virtue" (unknown). Through patience and labor a man is able to reap great rewards. But those who want something for nothing will always get what they pay for. Pride causes a person to want things right now. Much of the society in America has this kind of pride. Instant gratification is their philosophy. It is because of this philosophy that most people never truly appreciate what they have. If we want to get the most out of this life, it better for us to work with patience and wait for the end result to reap the benefits of a thing. Fruit always tastes better when the farmer waits until it has ripened before he picks it.

7:9: "Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools.": One who is easily provoked lives his life in bitterness, but the one who is "quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to wrath," is able to avoid all sorts of trouble. The fool falls headlong into a pit of trouble because he does not control his emotions.

7:10: "*Do not say, 'Why were the former days better than these?' For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.*": Many have said, "Those were the good ol' days." But, those who spend their time dwelling on the past never learn to appreciate the blessings of the present. They are so busy thinking about what they had that they never learn to enjoy the things that they have. Consider Israel who was on its way

to the Promised Land, but grumbled against God saying, “We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic” (Num. 11:5).

7:11-12: “Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and profitable to those who see the sun. For wisdom is a defense as money is a defense, but the excellence of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to those who have it.”: Riches are useless to the fool because he will waste it on his pleasure and end up with nothing (Luke 15:11ff., the prodigal son). Even the man who does not waste his riches, but does not know how to properly use them, will never be able to enjoy them. The Preacher has discussed this situation in detail in previous chapters. He is not contradicting himself, but is showing that there is a way to use riches in order to get the most out of life. The rich man who has wisdom is the one who views his riches in light of an eternal God. He is the one who views riches, not as the source of fulfillment, but as a gift given to him by God to use as a tool to serve God (Compare to [1 Tim. 6:17-19](#)). The man who uses his riches with godly wisdom will find life for himself where the fool will simply waste away.

7:13: “Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked?”: As we approach life, we must remember to consider the work of God. There is “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:6). When we remember that God is in control, we will be better able to deal with the various situations we find ourselves in throughout our lifetimes (Hab. 3:17-19).

7:14: “In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.”: Most people rejoice in times of prosperity and say that God has truly blessed them, but when they face times of adversity they curse God saying, “God, why me?” The wise man, on the other hand, “considers the work of God” (Eccl. 7:13). He acknowledges that the Lord gives and He also takes away (Job 1:21). Since the Lord is in control, and since He is the only true source of happiness and fulfillment, it is better for us to trust in the Lord rather than complain about what He does.

Wisdom for Balanced Living

Eccl. 7:15-29

7:15: “I have seen everything in my days of vanity: There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs life in his wickedness.”: The Preacher has seen righteous men be destroyed for doing good. At the same time he has seen evil men benefit from their wickedness. This seems to be upside down compared to what most people see as the ideal picture. We are told that “crime does not pay,” but there are many who commit crimes and get away with it. If all we look at is physical life, then those who steal and commit murder and get away with it seem to have the upper hand. However, as the Preacher goes on, he will show that even though the wicked man “prolongs his life in his wickedness,” he is actually bringing death and condemnation upon himself.

7:16: “Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?”: God is the standard of righteousness and no man is able live up to that standard completely (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, technically, it is not possible for one to be overly righteous. Likewise, it is not possible for a person to be overly wise. However, it is possible for one to see himself as more righteous than he really is (Luke 18:10-14). There are some who, in their efforts to be righteous, become self-righteous (Rom. 10:3). It is possible for one to view himself as having more wisdom than anyone else around him. “*For I say...to everyone who is among you, not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think soberly...*” (Rom. 12:3). Those who are self-righteous and overly wise destroy themselves in their own conceit. “Therefore, let him who thinks

he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). True wisdom and righteousness causes one to acknowledge his own shortcomings in light of God’s righteousness and wisdom (Matt. 5:3).

7:17: “Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?”: All men sin, but there are some who actively pursue sinful things. We must avoid both extremes: self-righteousness and wickedness. If we want to enjoy this life the way God intended, then we must learn to walk humbly before Him in righteousness while avoiding the pitfalls of wickedness and foolishness. If we go to either extreme we will destroy ourselves. But, if we walk the “strait and narrow,” then we will have life (Matt. 7:13-14).

7:18: “It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all.”: What is “good” for a man to gain in all of his toils under the sun? To understand how to live before God in this life. “It is good that you grasp this.” In order to truly enjoy this life the way God intended we must learn to approach it with the proper perspective. “Fear God and keep His commandments” (Eccl. 12:13). If we do this, then we will avoid all of the pitfalls and vanities of earthly life.

7:19-20: “Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city. For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.”: All men sin, even the righteous. Wisdom is greater than riches because if we have wisdom, we are able to see our faults and do what is necessary to come out of sin. Riches cannot do that. In fact, riches can make it more difficult to flee sin (Matt. 19:23-24).

7:21-22: “Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.”: There is no one living who has not had something bad said about them. Conversely, there is no one living who has not said something bad about someone else. Even the most careful people have been guilty of this. The point of this verse is that everybody makes this mistake. Sometimes it is better for us to be forbearing and forgiving when we hear things said about us then to take it to heart. We make the mistake of saying things we don’t mean. Understand that others make the same mistake. Therefore, judge them by the same standard that you judge yourself.

7:23-24: “*All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, ‘I will be wise’; but it was far from me.* As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out?”: Young people think they have life figured out, but the older person knows that there is much more to life than the younger person realizes. Yet, even those who are well advanced in years realize that they do not know everything either. Nevertheless, men try to find fulfillment and happiness by gaining wisdom and knowledge. But, even with modern science, there are some things too deep for us to grasp. Not even the wisest person to walk on the earth can answer all questions. No one can have all wisdom and all knowledge; therefore it can never make him truly happy. We must learn that wisdom and knowledge are not sources of happiness, they are tools to direct our heart to the one true source. That is why the Proverbs describes the wise man, not as the one who knows everything, but as the one who fears God (Prov. 9:10).

7:25-26: “I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and the reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness. And I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be trapped by her.”: The preacher put his heart and mind into considering this matter. After dwelling on it for a while, he realized that there is something that is worse than death. What could be worse than the death of a spouse? Finding a woman whose heart is snares and nets—a woman who is crafty, possessive, controlling, backbiting, bitter, and contentious. This is the woman who

tries to lure a man into her control. How would she do that? Feminine charm. Many foolish men have been snared by such feminine charm (Prov. 5:1-6). A person who is trying to please God will escape such a woman because he will not be lured by her charm. The man who fears God heeds the command to “Flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18). The righteous man will consider the character of a woman as more valuable than her femininity.

7:27-28: “*‘Here is what I have found,’ says the Preacher, ‘Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, which my soul still seeks but I cannot find: One man among a thousand I have found, but a woman among all these I have not found.’*”: The preacher has looked at everything and yet he is still looking for the answers to life. In all of his searching he has not found one man out of a thousand. That is, he has not found one man that he can put his trust in totally and completely. Though he may have found one man in a thousand, he has not found even one woman to put his trust in. This is a hyperbole to illustrate the fact that we cannot put our faith in humanity. Men often put their faith in the masses. “How can so many people be wrong?” They follow the majority as their standard. “Everybody is doing it.” We must realize that men make mistakes. While we can trust some men to a limited extent, there is only one that we can put complete trust in—God.

7:29: “Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.”: God is the only truly trustworthy person. He has made all things upright and good, man has corrupted all things. It was because of sin that the earth was corrupted and it is because of continual sin that death spreads to all men (Rom. 5:12). If we want happiness and fulfillment, God is the source, not humanity or the works of men’s hands. God is the one in whom we must put our faith.

Questions

Lesson Seven

1. What are the main points of this chapter?
2. What is better than precious ointment?
3. Which is of more value, the day of death or the one's birth?
4. Why is it better to attend a funeral rather than a party?
5. Why is sorrow better than laughter?
6. Where does the heart of the wise reside? The heart of the fool?
7. Which is better, to hear rebuke from the wise, or a song from a fool?
8. What is the laughter of the fool?
9. What destroys a man's reason? What debases the heart?
10. What other two comparisons are made?
11. Why should one not hasten to be angry?
12. What is not a wise thing to say?
13. What is good along with an inheritance? Why?
14. What is the value of knowledge?
15. What should we consider about the work of God?
16. What should we do in days of prosperity? In days of adversity? Why?
17. What two things had the Preacher seen in the days of his vanity?
18. Against what does the Preacher caution?
19. How strong is wisdom?
20. Is there anyone who does not sin?
21. What should one not take to heart?
22. In his efforts to be wise, what did the

Lesson Eight

Ecclesiastes Chapter Eight

Work in Submission

Eccl. 8:1-8

8:1: “*Who is like a wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man’s wisdom makes his face shine, and the sternness of his face is changed.*”: Living within the regulations of the government is a major part of every person’s life. This section offers instruction for living under such circumstances. Is there a man who has all wisdom and can see the end of all things? Is there a man who can solve all problems and avoid all troubles? The obvious answer is no (see notes in 7:23, 24). Nevertheless, men do have some wisdom. Not wisdom to avoid every hardship, but wisdom to overcome hardships and to learn from them. A man who does not learn from his trials will become hardened and bitter. The weight of his many struggles can be seen in the expression of his face. But, the man who approaches life with wisdom will have a countenance that shines. Why? Because, by wisdom, he will learn from his struggles and be enriched by them. Through wisdom he will have patience and through patience he will be made a better man. See James 1:2-5; Heb. 12:5-11).

8:2: “*I say, ‘Keep the king’s commandment for the sake of your oath to God.’*”: There is more than one reason to keep the laws of the land. The practical reason is that obedience to the law keeps us safe and out of trouble. But, there is another reason—we owe it to God. One who proclaims allegiance to God is one who makes an oath to obey Him. In the Old Testament the Jews had made such an oath. Today Christians make that same oath when they obey the gospel (See Rom. 6:17-18). Those who serve God should understand that He is the source of all authority. “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Rom. 13:1-7). If we want to live this life the way God intended, then we must be subject to whatever government that we are born under.

8:3: “*Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him.*”: When one man is offended by another, it is common for the one who is offended to walk away from the other out of spite. The Preacher is saying if a king offends you, either by passing a law or by adopting a philosophy that you do not agree with, do not be hasty to walk away from him as you might any other man. This advice may well apply to any form of authority: police men, judges, employers, etc. Better to hear the king out and to remain in his presence with patience than to leave in anger and risk his wrath. Do not take a stand against the king especially in an evil thing. To choose to fight for such a thing will only end in your ruin.

8:4: “*Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say to him, ‘What are you doing?’*”: As individual citizens, we have no right to criticize the laws of the king. We may disagree with them, but it is not our place to murmur and complain. Power is not in our opinions, but in the law. Therefore, do not rebel against the law.

8:5: “*He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; and a wise man’s heart discerns both time and judgment,*”: If we live in submission to the law of the land, then we will avoid the wrath of

the king. A wise man will see foolish laws for what they are, but he will show respect toward those law, nevertheless. If we can keep the law without disobeying God, then we should do so rather than rebel.

8:6-7: “Because for every matter there is a time and judgment, Though the misery of man increases greatly. For he does not know what will happen; so who can tell him when it will occur?” If something needs to be done about an unjust law, there is a time to deal with that matter. If a traffic ticket was given unjustly, it would be unwise to argue with the police officer on the side of the road. Instead, it is better to deal with the matter in the court. There, one can present the evidence and behave wisely. In so doing the ticket will be overturned. Many people have done the right thing at the wrong time and as a result caused more harm than good. We must use wisdom in this life to determine when is the right time to act. “To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under the sun” (Eccl. 3:1). Sometimes injustice happens and there is nothing we can do about it. Therefore, the misery of men will increase through time. “Though the misery of man increases greatly.” In such cases, when there is nothing we can do, it is wise to let God deal with the matter. See Rom. 12:19.

8:8: “No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, and wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.”: No man is able to prolong the day of his death (retain the spirit). Also, if a man is in war and his wife at home is having a baby, he is powerless to release himself from the war in order to go see his child. He must continue fighting. What does that have to do with keeping the law? Everything. There are some things in this life that we simply cannot control. There are things that we are powerless to do anything about, such as death and war. We may live in a country where the leaders make wicked laws, but nothing we do can change their minds about that. Since we can do nothing about it, it is better for us to simply do the best we can with the life we are given and let God take care of the rest. We may disagree with our rulers, but it is no our place to cause riots and rebellions. Since God is in control, we must learn to live respectable lives while upholding godly principles, and let God take care of the evil. If we resort to wicked things (mobs, riots, protests, etc.) to protest wicked rulers, then we are no better than those rulers.

Anticipate Wicked Rulers

Eccl. 8:9-13

8:9: “All this I have seen, and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: There is a time in which one man rules over another to his own hurt.”: There are times when one man has power over other people and his authority results in their hurt. Lawmakers may enforce a tax that drives the poor man into bankruptcy. When the freeway system was created in the U.S., small towns that thrived on tourism soon vanished because their tourists began zooming past on the Interstates. Such laws have always existed and there is really nothing we can do about it except put our faith in God.

8:10: “Then I saw the wicked buried, who had come and gone from the place of holiness, and they were forgotten in the city where they had so done. This also is vanity.”: The ASV may present a clearer translation of this verse. “So I saw the wicked buried, and they came (to the grave); and they that had done right went away from the holy place, and were forgotten in the city: this also is vanity” (Eccl. 8:10, ASV). A wicked man can die and people will go to his grave. But, there are many righteous people who, having done many good things, are not shown such honor. As sad as it is, and though it should not be this way, it is true. Therefore, the Preacher says, “this also is vanity.” The lesson to be learned is that if our goal is to always do what is right, do not think that we will receive much honor from men. Indeed, the wicked man will receive more honor than the righteous after his death. Therefore, our desire must be to be seen by God and not men (Matt. 6:1-4).

8:11: “Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”: Even when laws are given to provide consequences for evil deeds, such laws are not always executed in an expedient manner. Sometimes, there are laws in place which forbid a certain action, but no punishment is ever specified for breaking the law. Therefore, since men know they can break the law and get away with it, they continue breaking the law. They have no reason to fear the law because they know nothing will ever happen to them. Only when there is punishment for breaking the law and that punishment is carried out speedily will men be deterred from breaking that law.

8:12-13: “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked; nor will he prolong his days which are as a shadow, because he does not fear before God.”: In life under the sun, it often seems that the wicked succeed while the righteous suffer. It appears that while the wicked are at ease and live long lives, the righteous must labor and toil for every meal and their lives are shortened. Even though this may be the case, the Preacher says that the righteous are still better off than the wicked. When the end comes and men give an account for their actions, those who fear the Lord will prevail and will be blessed by God, but the wicked will be condemned (Luke 16). If we want to get the most out of life, we must fear God. Even though the wicked may seem to have the upper hand, don’t be deceived. They will receive their just reward in the end (Prov. 23:17-18).

Enduring Vanity in Life

Eccl. 8:14-17

8:14: “There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.”: There are times when evil things happen to righteous men. At the same time, there are many wicked men who live easy lives and receive things that ought to go to the righteous. These things are vanity. Though it happens this way, it is useless for us to reason, “The wicked receive better things than the righteous; therefore I will be wicked.” There are two lessons to learn: 1. Physical blessings are not always an indication of whether we are good or evil. 2. We cannot do what is right and expect that we will never suffer. Therefore, rather than thinking we will have a perfect life under the sun by being righteous, let us rather make due with whatever situation we find ourselves in and do the best we can looking forward to what is to come.

8:15: “So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.”: Because of the vanities discussed in the previous verses, the Preacher again draws the conclusion that the best we can hope to get out of this life is to simply enjoy what we have been given. Rather than trying to fight against evil leaders, rather than agonizing over injustice, and rather than worrying about men who get away with their wickedness, let us learn to trust that God is in control, that a time will come when crooked things will be taken care of, and learn to enjoy what God has given us now.

8:16: “When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night,”: There are some who are extremely successful in this life, but the reason they are so successful is that they work so hard that they are always moving, always worrying, and always searching to get the upper hand. Such a man may be successful, but he never truly appreciates the life that God gives him. Such is not what God intended for man in life under the sun.

8:17: “then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it, yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.”: No matter how hard men work or how diligently they search, they will never be able to find out all the answers to life. We will never be able to fully comprehend all of the works that God has done. We will never be able to answer every question we come across. Many who have spent their lives trying to figure things out usually come to one basic conclusion; the more they learn, the more they realize they really do not know. What is the conclusion? Rather than trying to solve every problem, straiten every crooked thing, or right every wrong, we must instead learn to trust in God. God has given us certain things to appreciate in this life. Rather than looking for something else, let us learn to enjoy what God has provided.

Questions

Lesson Eight

1. What are the main points of this chapter?
2. What benefit does wisdom have?
3. Why should one be in submission to the king or government?
4. Generally speaking, what will one experience who heeds the king's command?
5. What will a wise man discern, even though misery may increase greatly?
6. What is said of those who are given to wickedness?
7. What had the Preacher observed about the rule of men?
8. What did he observe about the wicked and the one who had come and gone from the place of holiness?
9. Why were the hearts of some men set to do evil?
10. What did the Preacher conclude about a sinner whose days are prolonged?
11. What did the Preacher describe as a vanity which occurs on earth?
12. In view of such vanity, what does the Preacher commend? Why?
13. What did the Preacher conclude after diligently observing the business that is done on the earth?

Ecclesiastes

Chapter Nine

Death Happens to All

Eccl. 9:1-6

9:1: “For I considered all this in my heart, so that I could declare it all: that the righteous and the wise and their works are in the hand of God. People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.”: The Preacher applied great wisdom and effort to sort this matter out and to explain it in the best way. He made sure conclusion may be true and accurate and so that we may learn wisdom. The lives of the righteous and of the wise are in the hand of God—they are under God’s providential control. All men have the gift of free-will to decide what we will do with what is given to us, but we have no say as to what will be given to us. Neither do we have any say as to what will come of us in this life. All such things are in the hand of God. A man may say, “Look at the abundance that I have been given. Surely, God must be pleased with me.” Another man may say, “Look at how hard my life has been. Surely God must be angry with me.” But, according to the Preacher, “People know neither love nor hatred by anything they see before them.” We cannot tell whether God is angry or please by our physical circumstances. The Preacher explains why in the next verse. “We must not, like the friends of Job, assume that a man is a great sinner because calamity falls upon him (Job 4:7-8). Nor, should we ever assume that a person is right with God, because they are being blessed by outward prosperity (Luke 12:15-21; 16:19-20)” (Dunagan).

9:2: “All things come alike to all: One event happens to the righteous and the wicked; to the good, the clean, and the unclean; to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; He who takes an oath as he who fears an oath.”: In this verse the Preacher lumps all types of men together: righteous, wicked, good, clean, unclean, sacrificial, selfish, sinners. Both good and bad things happen to men of every character and circumstance. Many wise men have suffered while many wicked men have prospered. Yet, the opposite is true as well. Our own righteousness or wickedness do not control our earthly circumstances. All men, regardless of character, will experience both good and evil during their lifetime and will eventually die. Though Joseph was a wise and righteous young man, he was a slave and imprisoned for part of his life. But, during his later years he lived like a king. Yet, neither his suffering nor his success was the result of his righteousness or his wisdom. Rather, Joseph’s life was in the hand of God. Consider also the faithful of Hebrews 11 who suffered many things. We must expect that both good and bad things will happen to us throughout our life-times. We cannot prevent evil things from happening; we are simply along for the ride. However, regardless of the evil that we experience in this life, the difference between the righteous and the wicked is this, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). Therefore, as we consider our lives, let us not assume that we are in control or that bad things should never happen to us. Rather, let us put our trust in God, for our lives are ultimately in His hands. “*Instead, you should say, ‘If the Lord wills we shall live and do this or that’*” (James 4:13-17). Though who believe that their righteousness should earn them only good things in this life do not fully put their trust in God.

9:3-5: “This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead. But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope, for a living dog is better

than a dead lion. For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the member of them is forgotten.”: Though men recognize that it is an “evil” thing for the good to suffer and the wicked to prosper, the fact is that it happens. As a result, however, the Preacher observes that when men do not experience any immediate consequences for their wickedness, they are often emboldened to go on sinning. I.e., “the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live.” Many believe that if they do not “get caught,” then they must have gotten away with something. Lest we begin to think like that, we must remember that all men die. If we die while pursuing wicked schemes, then we have no hope of rectifying ourselves and undoing our wickedness. But, so long as we are alive, there is hope for us to turn away from our wickedness. “But for him who is joined to all the living there is hope.” There may be a wealthy and powerful man who did wickedness, but once he dies his wealth and power are gone and he is powerless to avoid eternal condemnation. He is like a dead lion. On the other hand, there may be a poor man who retains his righteousness. For him there is still hope. He is as a living dog. His physical life may not have been as glorious or grand as the lion’s, but in the end he is better off because he still has hope. Let us therefore consider our lives and use what little time we have on this earth to pursue righteousness and not be deceived into thinking that we can get away with sin (Gal. 6:7-8).

9:6: “Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun.”: Once we die we no longer have the ability to share in the love, hatred and envy of the living. We will no longer have anything to do with the physical things that we sought after when we were alive. If, during our lives our hearts are only focused on material things, then when we die we will have lost all that we loved and we will be empty. But as Jesus teaches us in Matt. 6:24-34, if, while we are alive on this earth we set our hearts on spiritual (eternal) things, even after we die we will still be full because we will have those things with us. Of the things that are “under the sun,” we will have nothing.

Living in Light of Death Eccl. 9:7-10

9:7: “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.”: In light of the truths previously discussed, the Preacher here offers instructions on how God intended for us to approach life under the sun. Whatever we have to eat or drink, we must learn to be thankful and to be glad for that, because God has provided it for us. Let us not be envious of that which we do not have, but rather enjoy what we have been given today and remember to be thankful to God. For He could have chosen to not give us anything at all. God has accepted our works in that He already knows how a man ought to live on this earth. As long as we live the way we are supposed to and enjoy things that way they are meant to be enjoyed, then we know that God will be accepting of us. We are not the ones who determine how to live in this life, but God has already made that determination. If we live the way He has determined that we should live, then He has already accepted our works.

9:8: “Let your garments always be white, and let you head lack no oil.”: Live in a comfortable way while retaining respectability and pursuing righteousness. God created this life in such a way that we are able to enjoy it. Therefore, as much as we are able, we should enjoy life the way He intended. We are not to live in excess, neither are we to live in mourning. Rather, enjoy the Lord’s blessings in righteousness.

9:9: “Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.”: This is a vain life because it is going to end. We have things to enjoy, but after we die they won’t do us any good. We should enjoy our marriages. The fact of the matter is that no

marriage is trouble free. In fact, the worst years of marriage are probably the first two to five because of the many changes that must take place during that time. It takes time, sacrifice and effort for two people to develop a solid working relationship. But if both people are working at fulfilling their God-given roles, then the longer they are married the better their life together will become. Such a life is meant to be enjoyed. Don't squander such a relationship by pursuing selfish things. Rather, if we learn to dwell with our spouses in love it has the potential of being one of the most enjoyable aspects of this fleeting life.

9:10: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with you might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.": God purposed for men to be productive and industrious. If we want to have a good life then we need to learn how to be productive. When God provides opportunities for us we must learn to take advantage of them. Laziness not only causes us to waste away, it also blinds us to the eternal consequences of such a life. After we die we will not have another opportunity to make up for years wasted during this life. Therefore, as God blessed us with the ability to enjoy our labor, let us labor so that we may enjoy the fruit thereof. We must remember, however, that it is not good to let neither our labors nor our enjoyments to draw us away from God. The Preacher here is teaching us to seek a balance.

Time and Chance Eccl. 9:11-12

9:11: "I returned and saw under the sun that—The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor the bread to the wise, nor the riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.": The Preacher steps back and makes another observation concerning life under the sun. In a race, because of unforeseen circumstances, the fastest man does not always win. He may trip, pull a muscle, etc. Likewise, a man may be skillful, talented, and wise, but he may still have a hard life. In spite of the opinion of men, the key to living a good life is not to avoid hardship, for no man can avoid it. "Time and chance happen to them all." In fact, the man who seeks to avoid hardship will make his life even worse because his constant failure to do so. The wise and righteous person must understand that time and chance happen. Thus, rather than avoiding hardship, he will be strengthened by it. He will learn greater patience, gain more wisdom, and strengthen his faith in God.

9:12: "For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them.": A man cannot control which years he will live on the earth—whether during wartime or during peace; whether during famine or prosperity. A fish will be caught in a net because it happens to be swimming in a certain area the same time that the fisherman is doing his work. So, a man may be born in evil times. We cannot control the circumstances of our lifetime, but we can control what we do with them. The man who makes the most of this life learns to trust in God and to be pleasing to Him regardless of the circumstances in which he lives (see Hab. 3:17-19).

Wisdom is Greater than Strength Eccl. 9:13-18

9:13: "This wisdom I have also seen under the sun, and it seemed great to me.": Wisdom will not help a man avoid all trouble, but it is better than physical strength.

9:14-15: "There was a little city with few men in it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great snares around it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that same poor man.": The Preacher illustrates the strength of

wisdom. Even when all odds are stacked against this little city, it may happen that the poorest man in the city may have wisdom to advise the king or to do something that will cause that little city to be spared. In such a case, wisdom was victorious where strength had failed. David and Goliath is a perfect example of this very thing. All the nation of Israel was at a loss for what to do in light of Goliath's challenge. But, David, a small, ruddy, young man had wisdom enough to trust in God. Because of his faith and wisdom, David not only conquered the giant, but brought victory for the nation of Israel. See the next verse for the lesson.

9:16: ***“Then I said: ‘Wisdom is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.’”***: Though wisdom will not cause us to avoid hardship, it will help us to overcome it where physical strength is useless. Many people fail to see the benefits of wisdom over physical strength and power. As a result, wise men are not often recognized. But, in the end, those who value wisdom and righteousness will have the upper hand.

9:17: **“Words of the wise, spoken quietly, should be heard rather than the shout of a ruler of fools.”**: If we want to get the most out of this life, then we need to learn to trust in godly wisdom rather than physical strength. We need to tune our hearing to wise things rather than strong things. Righteousness will bring more good to our lives than riches (Matt. 6:19). Giving ourselves to God will have greater return than a large savings account (2 Cor. 8:1-5, 15). Words spoken wisely are better protection than the most powerful weapons. **“For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things”** (1 Tim. 4:8). Those who never learn to understand these things will never be able to truly come to Christ (1 Cor. 1:18-25).

9:18: **“Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.”**: Wisdom may not help us to avoid every hardship, but because of the great benefits of wisdom, it is still far better than living in wickedness. Wisdom at least upholds that which is good and will help lead us to eternal life, but wickedness will only destroy that which is good, and lead us to destruction.

Questions

Lesson Nine

1. What are the main points of this chapter?
2. What did the Preacher consider about the righteous and the wise?
3. What two observations did he make concerning the righteous and the wicked?
4. What one event does he discuss that happens to everyone?
5. What two things does he see in the hearts of men? What happens to them?
6. Who still has hope? Why?
7. What is said of the dead?
8. What does the Preach counsel the living to do?
9. What reason does he give for such counsel?
10. What other observations did the Preacher make about life?
11. What observations did he make about wisdom?

Ecclesiastes

Chapter Ten

Wisdom is Greater than Folly

Eccl. 10:1-4

10:1: *“Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.”*: In the previous chapter the Preacher expounded upon the great benefits of wisdom. He continues that thought here while reminding us that as great as wisdom is, it takes only one evil thing to ruin a life that is built upon wisdom. A man can work his entire life to establish a good name for himself, but it takes just one mistake to lose that status. *“Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good”* (Eccl. 9:18). *“A little bit of folly (stupidity) can severely damage the credibility of one who has a reputation for wisdom”* (Hitchin, pg. 207).

10:2: *“A wise man’s heart is at his right hand, but a fool’s heart at his left.”*: Because most people are right handed, it is common in many cultures, as well as in the Scriptures, for the right hand represent honor and for the left to represent dishonor. Jesus is at the right hand of God (1 Pet. 3:22). The kings of Israel were described as a signet on God’s right hand (Jer. 22:24). See also Gen. 48:12-20. Therefore, for a man’s heart to be in his right hand is for his heart to bring him honor. Though the wisdom of a wise man will not prevent him from experiencing hardship, it will give honor to his life. His heart brings him honor because he sets his heart on that which is good, noble, pure, etc—Phil. 4:8-9. However, when a man sets his heart on evil things, he places his heart in his left hand because such things only bring dishonor to his life. *“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things”* (Matt. 12:34). If we want to get the most out of this life, let us not only go through the motions of doing good, but let us learn to set our hearts on that which is good.

10:3: *“Even when a fool walks along the way, he lacks wisdom, and he shows everyone that he is a fool.”*: There is little that hides the true character of a fool. Perhaps he can hide his foolishness by simply not talking (Prov. 17:28). But, as the Preacher points out, eventually the manner in which he conducts himself will give him away. A fool is known by the decisions he makes, by the things which he values in life, and by the way he treats other people. Just as the ungodly, sinners, and scornful have their own characteristics (Ps. 1:1), so the way of the fool is easily recognized. Why? Because he chooses not to live life under the sun the way God intended. Fools fail to apply godly principles to every aspect of their lives.

10:4: *“If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post; for conciliation pacifies great offenses.”*: When faced with the anger of a ruler, some men are tempted to flee. Maybe they leave in a huff because they are displeased with the ruler. Maybe they leave out of fear, not wanting to face the ruler’s wrath. Men who react to situations with anger and violence may also fit into this analogy. Whatever the case may be, it is better to hold one’s ground and remain at his post than to flee. The point that the Preacher is trying to get us to see is that if we simply keep our composure and respond with gentles rather than anger or cowardice, we may actually avoid the wrath of the ruler. If a man is pulled over by a police officer, he may avoid getting a ticket if he is calm and courteous, but if he reacts in a rash manner he will surely receive the ticket, or ever worse.

Folly Manifested

Eccl. 10:5-15

10:5: “There is an evil I have seen under the sun, as an error proceeding from the ruler.”: It is an evil thing for error to proceed from one who rules over other people—error and rule do not mix well. There is an evil which the Preacher has seen that is as backward as a ruler who is full of error.

10:6: “Folly is set in great dignity, while the rich sit in a lowly place.”: The evil that the Preacher has seen is that folly (foolishness, stupidity) is given honor among men. How often do we see this in our world today? And it only seems to be getting worse. Children’s shows are filled with foolish ramblings, and yet children flock to them. Men who perform stupid stunts and live to tell about them are praised as being heroes. Men who rebel against the government and turn the people’s hearts against their leaders are glorified among men. Judges and lawmakers are passing laws that are deteriorating the moral condition of our country. At the same time, that which ought to receive honor is ignored and despised by many.

10:7: “I have seen servants on horses, while princes walk on the ground like servants.”: Riding on a horse was a sign of distinction and wealth. Therefore, the servant’s place was beside the horse, while the prince was the one who should have been riding the horse. Nevertheless, the Preacher has observed that sometimes things which ought to be given honor are lowered, as a prince who is made to walk, while foolish and worthless things are exalted, as a poor man who is set upon the horse. This is a vanity of life that, sad as it must be, we must continue to live with.

10:8: “He who digs a pit will fall into it, and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a serpent.”: When a man digs a pit, if he becomes overconfident or careless, he will fall into it. However, if one looks ahead, considers the dangers and takes necessary precautions, he can avoid such a fate. At the same time, a man who digs through a wall (presumably the wall of some ancient city), if he does not use caution will be bitten by a snake that may have made his home in a crack or crevice. Some have taken this verse to mean that what a man sows, that he will also reap. While that is certainly true, when placed in the context of the next two verses, it seems more reasonable that the Preacher is teaching us to exercise wisdom and foresight in whatever we do and to avoid carelessness.

10:9: “He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits wood may be endangered by it.”: Any occupation comes with its own set of dangers. Construction workers may be injured by the tools they use, horse trainers may get kicked by the horses they train, even office workers may staple their fingers if they do not use caution. While wisdom cannot avoid every hardship, there are certain hazards that one can avoid, regardless of their occupation, if they just use some common sense.

10:10: “If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success.”: This is the kind of common sense that the Preacher is talking about. The fool does not prepare for the work that he is about to do. Because he does not apply common sense to fulfilling his task, he makes his job, even his life, that much more difficult. However, like a man who takes a few minutes to sharpen his ax before chopping wood, any person who applies a little time and energy into planning ahead will make his life that much easier. A man who is too lazy to sharpen his ax may save time in preparation, but will take more time and use more energy while he is chopping. But the man who exerts a little energy to prepare the ax with save time and every while he is chopping. Wisdom will not cause us to avoid every hardship, but it will help us to avoid unnecessary difficulties and makes life a little more pleasant.

10:11: “A serpent may bite when it is not charmed; the babbler is no different.”: The KJV and the NKJV translate it as seen above. However, later translations reveal a greater understand of the Hebrew word for “babbler.” This word is used several other times in the O.T., but is nowhere else translated as “babbler.” Its literal definition is master, or more specifically, master of tongues or languages. In light of this, it seems that the NAS is more accurate, “If the serpent bites before being charmed, there is no profit for the charmer” (NAS). The lesson to be learned is that proper timing is necessary. A man may have great wisdom and skill at charming snakes, but if he delays in using his skill, it profits him nothing for he will get bit. Likewise, there may be men who have great wisdom, but if they hesitate to use that wisdom it will not do them any good. There is a good lesson for leaders in the church in this verse. For there are many preachers and elders who see the evils of a thing and know enough about the Scripture to do something about it, but if they delay in taking action against a sinful thing it will certainly come back to bite them.

10:12-13: *“The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious, but the lips of a fool shall swallow him up; The words of his mouth begin with foolishness, and the end of his talk is raving madness”*: Though modern men tend to downplay the importance of words, the Preacher teaches us that the words one uses can either accomplish great good or great evil. The fool will begin saying things that are nonsense and when he is finished will have made plans that are absolute madness. Therefore, let us consider our words carefully. What we say is a direct result of what is in our hearts. If we apply wisdom to our thoughts then our words will, in turn, be filled with wisdom, and ultimately our actions will be the result of wisdom rather than madness. But the man who speaks foolishness will only reap madness. “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36).

10: 14: “A fool also multiplies words. No man knows what is to be; who can tell him what will be after him?”: Because the fool does not consider his words he merely says whatever comes into his heart. He speaks confidently of things which he really knows nothing about. He shoots off at the mouth as if he knows all, but not even the wise man knows what will happen after him. In the end, to fool will be made know by his many and useless words.

10:15: “The labor of fools wearies them, for they do not even know how to go to the city!”: A fool does not apply forethought to his work, he does not apply wisdom to his work, he does not prepare for his work; therefore, he becomes wearied by his many labors, but he accomplishes nothing. The statement, “for they do not even know how to go to the city!” is a humorous saying that makes a serious point. Put a fool on a road that leads to the city and he will become so busy in useless efforts that he will never find the city. We laugh at such a person, but in reality life has the ability to make fools out of all of us. Every person, at some point in his/her life, has become so preoccupied in foolish endeavors that he/she has lost sight of the real goal. Even Christians who believe in heaven can become so preoccupied with their worldly goals that they lose sight of their spiritual goals—they never make it to the city. Have we lost our way because of our own stupidity?

Wisdom and Folly Concerning the King Eccl. 10:16-20

10:16: “Woe to you, O land, when your king is a child, and your princes feast in the morning!”: It has been argued that the character of a man does not matter when it comes to the way in which he governs his people. This verse teaches us otherwise. Where it says, “your king is a child,” it can refer to his years or to his mentality or experience. “When the king acts like a child, when he is selfish, short sided and looking out only for his own needs and not accepting the responsibility of the welfare of his subjects, then woe be to the land. It will fall into disrepair, and will be open to being taken over by another” (Hitchen, pg. 221). When the princes feast in the morning they waste themselves and lose their ability to reason early on. As a result, they do not have the

ability to make good decisions throughout the day. There are some things we must come to understand as a result of these truths. 1. There are some things that we cannot avoid because of time and chance. 2. There are some things that we can avoid by applying wisdom. 3. There are some things that could be avoided, but that we cannot always avoid because of the foolishness of leaders. The key to living life is to walk with as much wisdom and possible, but leave the rest up to God. Because our lives are in the hands of human leaders, it is important that we pray for them. “for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (1 Tim. 2:2).

10:17: “Blessed are you, O land, when your kind is the son of nobles, and your princes feast as the proper time—for strength and not for drunkenness!”: In contrast to the previous verse, blessings can come upon a land when its leaders have been trained to make good decisions and have been raised in the kind of life that a leader lives. Such men understand the weight of the responsibility that is on their shoulders and they take that responsibility seriously. They do not feast in the morning because they know it will affect their judgment. They eat when they are hungry in the proper time and in such a way that it gives them strength rather than making them drunk and senseless. There is a time for everything. A good ruler is one who learns the proper time and acts accordingly.

10:18: “Because of laziness the building decays, and through idleness of hands the house leaks.”: Ruin does not always come through misfortune and calamity. Indeed, greater harm can be done through constant neglect because of laziness. A nation can come to ruin when ruled by a leader who does not exercise justice. A man’s life can go to waste when he does not apply diligence and wisdom. “Laziness will lead to the decay of any building. The natural order of “life under the sun” leads toward decay. What trees will do naturally in the forest, wood will also do in the home... Yet there certainly could be a deeper truth here. This could also be the reason why the woe was pronounced on any land whose rulers are lazy and slothful. Just as a home will decay without diligence so also will a nation. Yet it doesn’t stop there. So also will the soul” (Hitchcock, pg. 222). See also Matt. 25:28-29; Luke 8:18.

10:19: “A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes merry; but money answers everything.”: Why does one go to a feast? To have fun. There are certain things that are made for certain purposes. Just as feasts or parties are made for fun, wine is made for merriment and enjoyment. Notice, wine is for merriment, but it is not a necessity. Also, money is useful for answering a problem or getting one out of trouble. Things are meant to be used in certain ways and if we are to benefit from all things we must learn to use all things in the proper way. The fool is the one who feasts, not when it is time for laughter, but when it is time to work. The fool uses money, not to solve a problem, but for frivolous and wasteful living. The wise man, on the other hand, will use these things in the proper way and will therefore benefit from them.

10:20: “Do not curse the king, even in your thought; do not curse the rich, even in your bedroom; for a bird of the air may carry your voice and a bird in flight may tell the matter.”: Be careful what you say when you think no one else can hear. Learn to watch your tongue. Remember that what we say is a direct result of what is in our hearts. If we want to live respectable lives and avoid the wrath of rulers, we must learn to control our tongues, and even the thoughts of our hearts. Sometimes, when we think something in our hearts, we avoid saying those things in public, but when we are alone with a friend we cannot help but whispering our thoughts into their ear. But, once our words leave our mouths we have no control over them. We cannot take back the things that we say. We can wish that we had said nothing, but it is no longer in our control. As many parents have said, “If you don’t have anything nice to say, don’t say anything at all.” The Preacher is saying the same thing, but he takes it a step further. That is, don’t even think evil thoughts lest they be revealed in your speech.

Questions

Lesson Ten

1. What are the main points of this chapter?
2. What comparison is used to illustrate how folly ruins the reputation of the wise?
3. Where is the heart of a wise man? The heart of a foolish man?
4. When does the fool display his folly to everyone?
5. How should one respond when the spirit of a ruler rises against him?
6. What evil had the Preacher seen under the sun pertaining to government?
7. What four illustrations appear to teach the need to apply wisdom to business?
8. When the ax is dull, what is required? What will bring success?
9. To what is a babbler compared?
10. How are the words of the wise? What will the lips of fools do to him?
11. What do the words of a fool begin with? How do they end?
12. What else is said about a fool?
13. When is there woe upon a land?
14. When is a land blessed?
15. What is evidence of laziness and idleness?
16. What observations are made about feasting, wine and money?
17. Why should one not curse the king or the rich?

Ecclesiastes

Chapter Eleven

The Value of Diligence

Eccl. 11:1-6

11:1: “Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days.”: There seems to be some disagreement among scholars as to the exact point that is being made by this statement. The traditional Jewish understanding of this verse is that the Preacher is teaching us to cast our bread (resources, food, money, etc.) in benevolence to those who are in need. In so doing, when we return we will find again that which we have cast into the water (we will be rewarded for our benevolence). This conclusion is certainly supported throughout the Scriptures: Pr. 11:24; 13:7; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; 28:27; 2 Cor. 9:6. However, some have come to a slightly different conclusion. They understand this verse to be saying that we should learn to be industrious and to invest our resources, for in so doing we will receive what we have invested. Both of these conclusions are taught in the Scriptures, therefore it is not a matter of determining which understanding is Scriptural. But the context does seem to support the first conclusion the most. We cannot allow the uncertainty of the future to prevent us from giving as we should. The fact that we will “find it after many days” is not to be our soul motivation, but is an added benefit for those who generously give to others who are in need.

11:2: “Give a serving to seven, and also to eight, for you do not know what evil will be on the earth.”: As with the previous verse, this one can be understood two ways. Seven is used throughout the Scripture to represent completeness. Therefore, eight would represent beyond what is complete or enough. When we give, we should not only be willing to give to the point of pleasing God, but we should strive to be cheerful givers who desire to do more than what is enough. We should try to be cheerful givers, going the second mile, turning the other cheek and giving our shirt as well as our cloaks. We can also learn from this verse the importance of diversifying our investments. We have many secular sayings that teach that very truth. “Don’t put all of your eggs into one basket.” “Don’t put all of your treasure on the same ship.” “Diversify your investments.” There is much wisdom in this.

11:3: “If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie.”: There are times when we look forward to the rain, such as during a drought. In such times, when we see the clouds coming we rejoice because we know that when they are full of rain they will empty on the earth and end the drought. On the other hand, when much rain has already come upon a land and the soil is saturated already, we have great fear and dread when we see more clouds coming because we know that they are full of rain and that they will empty themselves upon the earth and cause flooding, damage, and possibly death. The same truth is expressed with the tree. A tree may fall one way and cause no harm, but it may fall another way and live upon someone’s home. Yet, there is nothing that we can do to keep these things from happening. Once they happen it is done and there is nothing we can do to change that. What is the lesson we learn from this? The Preacher makes it clear in the next verse.

11:4: “He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap.”: The wind is going to blow when it is ready to blow. But for the one who is sowing his seed, the

wind makes his job very difficult. He needs for the seed to land on the good soil so that it will bring forth fruit, but of the wind blows it will very likely take some of his seed away with it. That is not a good thing for the sower, but he can do nothing to stop it. Regardless of whether or not the wind blows, the sower must sow if he is going to have a crop. But the man who regards the wind—waits for the wind to stop blowing before he is willing to sow—will never get around to planting his crop and will, therefore, have nothing to harvest. This truth is also illustrated by the man who will not reap because of the rain. When the clouds are ready to send rain it will rain and the man who is waiting for just the right moment will never get his work done. These truths make the thoughts in verse three complete. Men have no control over what happens under the sun. We have no control over the world and nature. However, we do have control over what we decide to do in our own time. If we wait for the conditions to be just perfect; if we do not work because it might rain, if we do not build a house because a tree might fall on it, or if we do not sow because the wind might blow, then we will never do anything—we will eventually starve. Nevertheless, there are some people who live like that. They never do anything because they live life in fear of what might happen. If we want to get the most out of this life, we have to learn to take some risks and the things that we cannot control, we just have to be willing to trust in God and work with it the best we can.

11:5: “As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything.”: We do not know what the wind will do, whether it will bring a blessing or hardship. We do not know what will happen to a child as it grows in the womb, whether it will be healthy or not. We cannot control such things and we do not know why they happen certain ways, all we know is that they happen. Such forces are the result of God’s power and we can’t even begin to fathom the works that God does. Therefore, as we live life under the sun we can do one of two things. We can cower in fear of the unknown and do nothing with our lives because of all of life’s uncertainties, or we can put our hands to work at whatever we have the ability to do in spite of life’s uncertainties. We can live in fear, or we can learn to trust in God. We can avoid life’s struggles and starve, or we can face whatever challenges that come and receive a few scars but be happy and productive. Which would you choose?

11:6: “In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.”: When we have opportunity to work, we should use that opportunity to the best of our ability. When it is time to sow, regardless of what the weather might do, should sow. We don’t know whether our efforts will produce fruit. We never know. But we should work any way. If we work, good things may or may not happen. But if we do not work good things will most certainly never happen. If we want to find happiness in this life, then we need to stop stressing over life’s uncertainties, take every opportunity, rejoice in our success, learn from our failures, and learn to leave the rest up to God.

Wholesome Pleasures of Life

Eccl. 11:7-10

11:7-8: “Truly the light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to behold the sun; but if a man lives many years and rejoices in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that is coming is vanity.”: We should go about life in a sensible way and with wisdom. Have a good outlook on life. Work with our hands, enjoy what God has given us to enjoy, serve God faithfully and take joy in His blessings. There will come a “dark time” when we will no longer have the ability to enjoy what God has to offer in this life. If we spend it with a pessimistic outlook then it will be wasted. We must learn to appreciate each day for what it brings.

11:9: “Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.”: This verse begins the conclusion of the entire book. While the rest of the Bible speaks of life in light of eternity, this book looks at it from a slightly different perspective. The Preacher discusses life on earth and offers instruction to help us better understand the nature of this life and how God intends for us to live in it. The Preacher has mentioned in previous chapters that because of the great vanities and evils which exist in this life, it is better for one who dies at birth than for the one who has to experience all of the vanities and evils of life (Eccl. 6:3). But, the Preacher goes on to say that once we are here, there is nothing we can do about it but make the most of what we have. We must live the life that was given to us. Because we are in that situation, the Preacher offers instruction to teach us how to make the most out of this life. In this verse, the Preacher gives instruction to the young man because he, most of anyone, has reason to rejoice. True, many young people do not have ideal lives. But there are many things that they can rejoice in that make their hardships seem like little problems. Every person should learn to simply make the most out of whatever situation they find themselves in. If a young person has to work nights so he can go to school during the day, he should learn to rejoice and make the most of that situation. If a young family has to scrimp and save to make ends meet, they should look at the blessings they have and rejoice in them. This life is full of vanity, but it is also full of the blessings of God. Whatever we choose to do with the lives that we are given, we will give an account for that when the judgment comes.

11:10: “Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh, for childhood and youth are vanity.”: We may have many things to be sorry for, but what use is it to let those things get us down? One can live in misery over the vanities of his life or he can accept his losses, move on, and enjoy his blessings. If we want to get the most out of this vain life then the best thing to do is to remove evil from our lives, set aside the lust and futile pursuits of our youth and learn to live life the way God intended.

Questions

Chapter E leven

1. What are the main points for this chapter?
2. Why does the Preacher encourage you to “cast your bread upon the waters”?
3. Why does the Preacher counsel you to “give a serving to seven, and also to eight”?
4. What is the point of these two admonitions?
5. What two examples are given of things that are inevitable?
6. What does the Preacher caution against?
7. What two examples illustrate our limited ability to comprehend the ways of God?
8. How does the Preacher encourage diligence and benevolence?
9. Why does he encourage diligence and benevolence?
10. What is described as sweet and pleasant?
11. If one is blessed to live many joyful years, what should he still bear in mind?
12. What does the Preacher encourage the young man to do?
13. Yet what does the Preacher also encourage him to remember?
14. What else does the Preacher encourage the young man to do? Why?

Ecclesiastes

Chapter Twelve

Remember Your Creator

Eccl. 12:1-7

12:1-2: “Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come and the years draw near *when you say, ‘I have no pleasure in them.’* While the sun and the light, the moon and the stars, are not darkened, and the clouds do not return after the rain;”: The days of darkness are going to come when this life is nearly over. We may be ready to die, even wanting to die, because we no longer have the ability to take joy in this life. The Preacher here is describing old age—dark days. Death is right around the corner and the moon and stars will be seen no more. The Preacher will go on to describe the darkness of old age.

12:3: “In the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men bow down; when the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look through the windows grow dim;”: The body will become shaky (it will “tremble”) and our legs will no longer be able to carry our weight (strong men bow down). We will no longer have our teeth to enjoy good food (grinders cease because they are few). We will begin to lose our eye sight and will no longer be able to enjoy the beauty of creation (those that look through the window will grow dim).

12:4: “When the doors are shut in the streets, and the sound of grinding is low; when one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of music are brought low.”: In Ps. 141:3 and Micah. 7:5 our lips are depicted as doors; therefore, when the doors are shut in the streets must refer to the mouths of the old being closed. In our youth we laugh and sing with our mouths open, but a time will come we will be ashamed to open our mouths, lest others see our bare gums. Also, when evening comes the grinding of the mill dies down for the night. In like manner our mouths slow their grinding as our lives draw to a close. We will begin to lose our voices, they will become soft like the sound of a bird. Our singing will be brought low as we no longer have the voice or the breath to carry a tune (daughters of music are brought low).

12:5: “Also they are afraid of height, and of terrors in the way; when the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper is a burden and desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets.”: While we were young we may have climbed trees and scaled cliffs, but when we are old we will be afraid to walk down a set of stairs or to go too near anything that is high. We will be afraid about many things. Our hair is going to turn white like an almond tree in bloom. We will lose our mobility, even a grasshopper will be a burden. Our desire will fail so that we no longer enjoy the pleasures of life; we will make no plans; we will only want to stay and home close to our beds. When all is said and done we will leave this life with its darkness and then go into our eternal home. Then, this life will be over.

12:6: “Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the well.”: The silver cord, the golden bowl, the pitcher, and the wheel are all symbolic of a person’s life. A time will come when all of these things will be cut or broken and then it will be too late for us to remember our Creator. If we do not want this life to

be completely vain then we must remember our Creator before it is too late. We may think that we have time when we are older. But for most, when we reach the point in our lives that we fit the description in Eccl. 12:1-5, we are no longer able to remember much of anything let alone our Creator. Therefore, we must remember Him before we reach that point—before it is too late.

12:7: “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”: When we have died our bodies will turn back into dust and go back to the earth from where it came and our spirits will go back to God. At that point, there is nothing more we can do other than except the consequences for our deeds done in life under the sun.

The Conclusion of the Matter Eccl. 12:8-14

12:8: “*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, All is vanity.*”: On this earth, life under the sun is going to be a vain life. Try as we may to retain something in this life, the fact of that matter is that we are going to grow old, we are going to die, our bodies will go back to the earth and our spirits will go back to God. Every thing that gave us joy in this life will be over. The only thing we can do is to plan for eternal life. This is the way the author began the book in Eccl. 1:1, and it is how he ends the book. He puts life under the sun into its proper prospective.

12:9: “And moreover, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.”: Now bringing his book to a close and drawing one final conclusion from all of his observations, the Preacher shows us the value of this book and the duty of all men. The Preacher’s life work consisted of searching out answers and wisdom, as we have seen throughout the book. He sought to put his finding into proverbs in order to teach wisdom to others.

12:10: “The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright—words of truth.”: This reveals the purpose of the author in this book. He is trying to show us how to live under the sun; to provide acceptable and upright principles by which to live in this vain life. The instructions are truthful and in accordance with the will of God.

12:11: “The words of the wise are like goads, and the words of scholars are like well-driven nails, given by one shepherd.”: The words of the wise would include the teachings of the wise Preacher: statements, proverbs, and instructions for living in life under the sun. A goad is a stick with a pointed end that was used to prod cattle to make them go where they were to go. If cow kicks against the goad it would hurt, but it would make he go in the right direction. This was what Jesus referred to when speaking to Saul on the road to Damascus in Acts 9:5; 26:14. The words of the wise are like goads because they are sharp and pointed, but they motive the one who is taught by them to go in the proper direction. Notice, the words of the wise are not sweet like candy, nor are soft like feather pillows, but they are sharp like goads. Sometimes they hurt, but they are necessary. In most cases the words of Christ were much like goads. The scholars are ones who put these wise sayings together. These words are like nails well driven—sure, secure, steadfast as a nail that is firmly hammered into the wall. We can hang our lives on these sayings without fear of them letting us down.

12:12: “And further, my son, be admonished by these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh.”: There are many books written on any given subject. There is no end to the number of books that show a man how he ought to live. A man can wear himself out trying to

read every one of those books: motivational books, self-help books, marriage counseling, financial, etc. But of all of these, directs us to the words of the wise—the words of truth.

12:13: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for *this is man’s all*.” This is the ultimate answer to the question presented in Eccl. 1:3, “What profit has a man from all of his labors in which he toils under the sun?” The Preacher already stated that there is no profit from anything under the sun. There is nothing of this life that will benefit us eternally or will give us fulfillment. What then is the conclusion we must make? “Fear God and keep His commandments.” This is what we must do if we want to have any hope of a good life. If we want to have something that we can take with us into eternity, this is the way to do it. Only by serving God can we find true fulfillment. Only by seeking first His kingdom can we lay up treasure in heaven. This is man’s whole duty on the earth. Every thing a man does, every possession he acquires must take second place to serving God, for if we do not serve God we have nothing. There is only one thing and one thing alone that keeps a man from being swallowed up by the vanities of life under the sun—his service to God!

12:14: “For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”: In the end, when all is said and done, we will account for the way we lived in this life. We will be judged by the works that we do in the flesh, even our secret works and secret thoughts. If we have done good then we will receive good from our heavenly Father, but if we choose to pursue the vanities of this life and spend our days doing evil then we will receive the reward for that evil from our God and creator. Have you learned from the words of the wise? Are you willing to fulfill your purpose on this earth. Fear God and keep His commandments. That is your whole duty.

Questions

Lesson Twelve

1. What are the main points of this chapter?
2. What advice does the Preacher give to the young person?
3. What thirteen illustrations are used to depict one growing old and feeble?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.
 - f.
 - g.
 - h.
 - i.
 - j.
 - k.
 - l.
 - m.
4. How is death depicted at the end of verse 5?
5. What four illustrations are given to depict the decaying of the body?
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
6. What occurs at death as described in verse seven?
7. What is the recurring theme throughout this book?
8. What did the Preacher continue to do?
9. What are the words of the wise and scholarly like?
10. What did the Preacher encourage his son to do?
11. What two things should one keep in mind?
12. What does the Preacher offer as the conclusion for his search for meaning?
13. Why is this his conclusion?