

Ecclesiastes

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem”

I. Review

Ecclesiastes is an argument divided into four segments. Each segment is marked by a conclusion which builds upon the preceding one. The premise of the argument is found in **Ecc 1:2-3** "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

(3) What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?

- All is vapor (*hebel*): incomprehensible and uncontrollable.
- There is NO advantage to a man's labor under the sun.

Section 1 (Eccl. 1:2 - 2:26):

Ecc 2:24-26 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. (25) For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? (26) For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

- There is nothing inherently good in man.
- There is no joy apart from God.
- The sinner gathers for the one good in God's sight.

Section 2 (Eccl. 3:1 - 5:20):

Ecc 5:18-20 Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun during the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. (19) Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. (20) For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

- It is the gift of God to enjoy this vaporous life and labor under the sun.
- God has empowered the rich man to eat of wealth.

Section 3 (Eccl. 6:1 - 8:15):

Ecc 8:15 So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils throughout the days of his life which God has given him under the sun.

- Life is to be enjoyed by faith.
- Even though the wicked may prosper, they will face God's final judgement.

Section 4 (Eccl. 8:16 - 12:14):

Last class we looked at chapter 10. Qoheleth instructs us in the superiority of wisdom. However, he warns us that even the wise are vulnerable to the vaporousness of life under the sun. Wisdom's power to protect, such as it is, lies in acknowledging one's limitations and vulnerabilities. Interwoven throughout his exposition of *hebel-ness* is an emergent tapestry of rising hope that points to God's alternatives to man's prevailing predicament. The last two chapters of Ecclesiastes call for decisions to be God's disciples and to live in faith for Him.

II. Live by Faith

Ecc 11:1-6 Cast your bread on the surface of the waters, for you will find it after many days. (2) Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth. (3) If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and whether a tree falls toward the south or toward the north, wherever the tree falls, there it lies. (4) He who watches the wind will not sow and he who looks at the clouds will not reap. (5) Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things. (6) Sow your seed in the morning and do not be idle in the evening, for you do not know whether morning or evening sowing will succeed, or whether both of them alike will be good.

Wisdom's vulnerability must not be allowed to drive us to paralyzing anxiety or the inactivity of despair. Solomon has shown us in Eccl. 9:11 that time and chance overtakes everyone and we have no ultimate control over the outcome of our labors. We have already been told how we as believers ought to act: embrace the fullness of life, joy, and happiness. So how does faith live in this vaporous life under the sun?

Verses 1-6 are the answer to the riddle Solomon has been asking throughout the first ten chapters. He has encouraged us to "do good" (3:12), but he has not specifically explained how. Solomon is now going to make it relatively plain.

A. Life is an adventure in faith: Be bold (vv. 1-6)

1. Cast - Send forth for a providential purpose.
2. Bread - "Bread corn"
3. [Pro 19:17](#) One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.
4. Characterized by generosity (v. 2)
5. Trusting in the providence of God (vv. 3-6)
 - a. Time and chance (v. 3)
 - b. Cannot wait for 'ideal' conditions
 - c. God controls the results of our efforts.

B. Be Joyful (vv. 7-10)

Ecc 11:7-10 The light is pleasant, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun. (8) Indeed, if a man should live many years, let him rejoice in them all, and let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything that is to come will be futility. (9) Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things. (10) So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

1. Life is meant to be a joy (v. 7)
 - a. Rightly understood and prayerfully lived.
 - b. Light is a metaphor for God (Christ)
 - c. God is in control so don't worry
2. Joy in life is meant to last a lifetime (v. 8)
 - a. Admonition to the aged
 - 1) Life is fleeting
 - 2) Troubles are ever-present ([Job 5:7](#)) For man is born for trouble, As sparks fly upward.
 - 3) Prepare, death is coming.
 - b. Admonition to the young (v. 9)
 - 1) Rejoice in your youth
 - 2) Develop to the full and enjoy the gifts God has given you.
 - 3) Prepare, for there is coming a day of judgement.

C. Be Godly (Eccl. 12:1-8)

Ecc 12:1-8 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, "I have no delight in them"; (2) before the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are darkened, and clouds return after the rain; (3) in the day that the watchmen of the house tremble, and mighty men stoop, the grinding ones stand idle because they are few, and those who look through windows grow dim; (4) and the doors on the street are shut as the sound of the grinding mill is low, and one will arise at the sound of the bird, and all the daughters of song will sing softly. (5) Furthermore, men are afraid of a high place and of terrors on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags himself along, and the caperberry is ineffective. For man goes to his eternal home while mourners go about in the street. (6) Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; (7) then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

1. Remember your Creator

- a) Remembering was a significant component of Hebrew worship.
 - b) Keep the triune God and his word constantly in mind and heart.
 - c) Trust and depend on Him moment by moment.
 - d) Be thankful for all His gifts and promises.
 - e) Call on Him in time of need.
2. "Evil days" - Old age
- a) Keepers of the house - hands and arms that are weak and shake (v. 3)
 - b) Strong men - legs now bent and unsteady
 - c) Grinders - Teeth lost
 - d) Those that look through windows - eyes growing dim
 - e) Doors on the street are shut - loss of hearing
 - f) Sound of the grinding mill - voice, once strong, now faded
 - g) Rise up at the sound of a bird - lite sleeper, easily awakened
 - h) Daughters of song - lungs: breathing difficulties
 - i) Afraid of high places - Fear of falling
 - j) Terrors on the road
 - k) Blossoming of the almond tree - Gray hair
 - l) Grasshopper drags himself - Stiff joints, difficulty walking
 - m) Caperberry fails - Desires fail (food, sex)
3. Death
- a) Man's spirit goes to its eternal home.
 - b) The Preacher is alluding that there is much more to life and death than merely the inscrutable cycle of birth and death 'under the sun.'
 - c) Through the successive phases of the advance of sorrows, the decline of physical capacities, and then death itself, Solomon shows us that life and death are out of our control and in the strong hand of God.

III. Conclusion

Ecc 12:8-14 (8) "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "all is vanity!" In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. (10) The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. (11) The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. (12) But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body. (13) The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. (14) For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.

A. Solomon repeats his premise (v. 8)

1. Solomon has taught us of the enigmatic and uncontrollable character of our lives and the events that shape them.
2. Solomon has urged us to receive and enjoy life as a gift from God.
3. We are to enjoy life in all of its mystery.
4. We are to enjoy these things because the time is coming when we will not be able to enjoy them.
 - a) Read?
 - b) Sports?
 - c) Food?
5. The wise trust God and enjoy life.

B. The Preacher taught the people knowledge

1. The wise man is one who preserves, teaches, and arranges for the proper transmission of wisdom to others.
 - a) Pondered wisdom.
 - b) Searched
 - c) Arranged
2. Took care regarding the content and style of his writing.
 - a) Used words of delight but their meaning is not necessarily pleasant.
 - b) Words are like goads.
3. Masters of these collections are like well driven nails.
4. Given by one Shepherd
 - a) Represented by many under-shepherds
 - b) **Jer 3:15 "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding."**

C. The words of the wise (i.e., Scripture) are sufficient.

1. Warning not to go beyond the wisdom literature.
2. To arrive at this kind of wisdom demands much.
 - a) Hard experience
 - b) Suffering
 - c) Time

D. The Preacher's conclusion: Qoheleth's summation

1. Fear God and keep his commandments
 - a) This is man's all
 - b) This is what we are to do in the face of a *hebel* existence.
2. God will bring every act to judgement.

"With these final words Solomon reaches the pinnacle of believing wisdom. These are truly words of faith. Solomon has learned, as we all must, that he was not in control. Thus we learn as creatures we cannot trust time and events. We have no leverage over them. As we are time-bound, dust-bound creatures living under the sun, and as we are sons and daughters of Adam who will never escape God's comprehensive curse in this life, so we will never be completely "in the know," never satisfied, never free from trouble and calamity, never escape death in this life. Never. This is just as much true

for those who are believers as anyone else! Our only hope is in the living God, our maker and our Savior. Our hope is now clearer than it was for Solomon, but our calamitous, vaporous situation under the sun is no different.” (Meyers, *Table in the Mist*, p. 216)

Rom 8:18-25 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope (21) that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (23) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. (24) For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? (25) But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.