

The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 1:12 - 2:26

¹² I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹⁴ I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind.

¹⁵ What is crooked cannot be made straight,
and what is lacking cannot be counted.

¹⁶ I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” ¹⁷ And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.

¹⁸ For in much wisdom is much vexation,
and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

^{2:1} I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. ² I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” ³ I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of

their life. ⁴ I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. ⁵ I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶ I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. ⁷ I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. ⁸ I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

⁹ So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. ¹⁰ And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. ¹¹ Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

¹² So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. ¹³ Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. ¹⁴ The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. ¹⁵ Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why

then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that this also is vanity.

¹⁶ For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! ¹⁷ So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

¹⁸ I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, ¹⁹ and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. ²⁰ So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, ²¹ because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. ²² What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? ²³ For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.

²⁴ There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? ²⁶ For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

I. Striving for Lasting Meaning Under the Sun

A. Wisdom (1:16-18)

B. Laughter & Wine (2:1-3)

C. Work/Industry/Art (2:4-6)

D. Power/Wealth/Sex (2:7-9)

II. Evaluating the Pursuit Itself (2:10-23)

III. First Shafts of Light Break Through (2:24-26)

Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.

- 2 Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.

Isaiah 55:1-2

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If
anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

John 7:37

Blaise Pascal:

"As men have not been able to cure death, misery, or ignorance, they have
taken to not thinking about them so as to become happy."

"The sole cause of man's unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay
quietly in his room..." "Nothing is so unbearable for a man as to be in complete
repose, without passions, without business, without distraction, without
application. Then he feels his nothingness, his abandonment, his insufficiency,
his dependence, his impotence, his emptiness. Incontinent from the depths of
his soul there will arise boredom, melancholy, sadness, sorrow, spite, despair..."
"Man is obviously made for thinking. Therein lies all his dignity and his merit;
and his whole duty is to think as he ought. Now the order of thought is to begin
with ourselves, and with our author and our end. Now what does the world
think about? Never about that, but about dancing, playing the lute, singing,
writing verse, tilting at the ring, etc., and becoming a king, without thinking what
it means to be a king or a man."

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What do you make of the idea that death can give us the perspective we
need to begin to enjoy life?
- 2) How would you describe "true joy" to a friend who knows nothing of this?
- 3) What strategies do you think people you know, including yourself, use to
avoid facing the reality of death?