

VANITY VERSUS AN ABUNDANT LIFE IN CHRIST, PT. 2 (ECCLESIASTES 2)

[**Ecclesiastes 2:1-3 (The Vanity of Pleasure)**] I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth [gladness]; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also was vanity. I said of laughter –"Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?" 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 heaven all the days of their lives.

[If only Solomon could have just read **Ephesians 5:17-18**, "Therefore do not be unwise, but **understand what the will of the Lord is**. And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." Dissipation is another Greek "a-word", "asotia" which means not or without-saved, a "spiritual wastefulness due to excessive behavior and the dire consequences it brings."¹ Being filled with the Spirit brings forth the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its **passions and desires**." (**Galatians 5:22-24**) We read of how Solomon began, where "Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places." (**1 Kings 3:3**) Then we are told God appeared to Solomon in a dream of which God asked Solomon what he wanted and that God would give it to Him. Long story short, Solomon asked for wisdom to rule God's people and God replied by saying "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, **I** have done according to your words; see, **I** have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And **I** have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then **I** will lengthen your days." (**1 Kings 3:11-14**). As we continue with **Ecclesiastes 2**, take note of how many times the word "I", "my" and "myself" is used and that no credit is given to the grace of God, to THE I AM!]

[**Ecclesiastes 2:4-11 (Pursuing Greatness)**] **I** made **my** works great, **I** built **myself** houses, and planted **myself** vineyards. **I** made **myself** gardens and orchards, and **I** planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. **I** made **myself** water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. **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. **I** also gathered for **myself**

¹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/810.htm>

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. So **I** became great and excelled more than all who were before **me** in Jerusalem. Also **my** wisdom remained with **me**. 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; And this was **my** reward from all my labor. 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.

[While King Solomon is not mentioned by name in **Ecclesiastes**, and Bible scholars have argued about whether he wrote it or not, it is presumed by what we are given in text, that Solomon is the author. I say presumed and not assumed because presumed "implies more confidence or evidence backed [by] reasoning."² It is possible though that Ecclesiastes was a psuedo-autobiography, meaning someone else wrote it as though they were Solomon. Nevertheless, King Solomon is said to have "surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom" (**1 Kings 10:23**). This book begins, as we looked at chapter 1 last week, with "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." (**Ecclesiastes 1:1**) Also, **1 Kings 4:32** says, that he is said to have "spoke[n] three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five". The collecting of wisdom, musical instruments and gathering great riches including vast amounts of silver and gold, that all seems very much like it is Solomon. Yet he didn't stop there with his collecting, he also collected or gathered together "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart [from God]. [Consider THAT, as well as his focus on himself, when Solomon speaks of the foolishness of vanity. Vanity="hebel", emptiness, futile, meaningless.³ That is, all that foolishness, or vanity, that is empty and meaningless so to speak, as was the case with Solomon, and then also for us, as it leads one further from God. As Jesus stated, "**No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.**" (**Matthew 6:24**) While mammonas is the Greek word for mammon, and it means wealth or money, it is also "a Semitic term for "the treasure a person trusts in".⁴ Luke also recorded Jesus speaking about mammon, "**if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?**" (**Luke 16:11**) This message isn't intended to be about how we manage our money, as important as that is since we are stewards or managers of all that God entrusts us with, but in where our heart is, and though Solomon is said to have initially loved the Lord, it sures sounds like he got caught up in the "I's of life". The Apostle Paul

² <https://www.merriam-webster.com/grammar/assume-vs-presume>

³ <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/1892.htm>

⁴ <https://biblehub.com/greek/3126.htm>

spoke contrary to that by saying, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, **as to the Lord** and not to men [including one's self], knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; **for you serve the Lord Christ.**" (**Colossians 3:23-24**) While Solomon was ultimately speaking of the contrast between the having an eternal mindset versus having a temporal world-view of life, and then also living accordingly to God being our Creator who is reigning over all of His creation, and that we are His creation, and He has a plan and a purpose for us, presently and eternally (**Psalms 24:1**), yet we'll look at shortly something exceptionally important that is missing in his account besides the fact that he doesn't address the main thing that we are told took away his heart from God. Right now though, the question can be asked us, "is there anything keeping/turning your heart from God?", as we continue in what Ecclesiastes is telling us.]

[**Ecclesiastes 2:12-17 (The End of the Wise and the Fool)**] 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. Then **I** saw that wisdom excels folly as **light excels darkness**. 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. 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." For there is no more remembrance of the 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! 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.

[Now to further address what was/is critically missing in Solomon's account. What Solomon said, could be answered by his father, King David who said, "**The Lord** is my light and my salvation." (**Psalms 27:1**) He then said, "One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the **beauty of the Lord**, and to inquire in His temple." (**Psalms 27:4**) Having wisdom and/or riches without Christ is like Solomon said, having the same outcome as the fool and his folly. We are being pleaded with though, in God's Word, to let go of those things that dishonors and displeases God our Creator ("and the grasping of the wind"), and be striving (agonizomai) to make sure we have a right relationship with Him, and to pursue Him and His Righteousness, all of which we find through Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul told Timothy, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and **pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness**. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the

good confession in the presence of many witnesses." (1 Timothy 6:10-12) The Apostle Paul also said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:1-2)

That applied not only to the apostles but also to King Solomon, as He was the king who was to lead God's people. The idea of loving God and others is not a new concept brought on by the New Covenant in Christ. When Jesus was asked what is the Great Commandment of God, He said it is to love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind and then also to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). Jesus was actually referring to the book of Deuteronomy (6:5, 10:19) to love God with all that is in us and to also love the stranger. The Apostle Peter says of us, who have believed on Christ Jesus and received Him, "Therefore, to you who believe, **He is precious** [ah, the beauty of the Lord!]; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone," and "a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense". They stumble, being **disobedient to the word**, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (1 Peter 2:7-10) The Apostle Peter then elaborated by saying, "For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? [suffering because of your own sin] But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, **might live for righteousness**—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now **returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls**. (1 Peter 2:20-25) That right there is our response to the love of God and the goodness of God that leads us to repentance. (Romans 2:4)

Where all this leads us is in what Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." (John 14:15-18) Right after that, "Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how

is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." (**John 14:22-24**) That is then what is called "Communion/Fellowship with Christ" (Greek *koinonia*: in fellowship, sharing, contribution, participation). We're not to be building our kingdom, God is presently building His through Christ Jesus. **1 John 1:6-7** says, "If we say that we have fellowship [*koinonia*] with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship [*koinonia*] with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin." That is what it means to be One in Christ!

Solomon like us in many ways, even as wise as he was, had to learn the hard way. "For it was so, when **Solomon was old**, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David." (**1 Kings 11:4**) Hopefully, Solomon did indeed write the book of Ecclesiastes as it would mean, that if he did, and had repented, and was then looking back on his life as he wrote Ecclesiastes, he was older than old. Ecclesiastes therefore speaks of one who has a heart of repentance towards God, as we can go to the end of the book to where Solomon says, "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". (**Ecc1. 12:13-14**) Likewise with us, it is not too late, until it is too late. Yet now, as we have the teachings of Christ Jesus, we have a clearer picture, the revelation of Christ!

Once again, Ecclesiastes starts by saying, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." (**Ecclesiastes 1:1**) That is, the words of the "qoheleth". Qoheleth actually means a gatherer, collector or assembler, which can then mean one who gathers collections of wisdom, as would be the case here, or it can also mean the assembling of people, to then hear those said sayings of wisdom. The root of that word "qoheleth" is important as it is "qahal" which is used for the "assembly" of God's people. This book is called "Ecclesiastes", which is from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, and Ecclesiastes is then the Greek form of Qoheleth, and from there we get the word "ecclesiology" that means the study of the church, the body or congregation of God's people, also referred to as an assembly. It then can be said that Jesus is THE QOHELETH, as He is THE GATHERER! We can read that in Jesus' teaching in **Matthew 25**, where He says, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his

sheep from the goats. [As Jesus is the Good/Great/Chief Shepherd and He knows who are His-as the Apostle Paul warns us, "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity." (2 Timothy 2:19) Iniquity=adikia, without justice, similar to anomia=lawlessness, without the law; the opposite of those who practice righteousness, which IS the will of God, AND the character of God] And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" (Matthew 25:31-40) That is what manifests with our fellowship with God and Christ Jesus! As God's Word tells us, through the Apostle Paul, "We then, as workers together with Him [Christ] also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:1-2) You neddn't wait until you are older than old, perhaps like Solomon. Not only that but none of us are guaranteed that we will be older than old as we are not guaranteed tomorrow, on this earth in this life.

[Ecclesiastes 2:18-26 (The End of the Wise and the Fool)] 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. 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. Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. 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. For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor [All good but where's I AM?]. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? 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.

[Solomon right here seems to recognize the difference between being a qoheleth (gathering and collecting) versus THE QOHELETH who is really in charge of what is gathered and collected and to whom it will be ultimately given. As was with Solomon, who was really, tested by God, by being blessed with great riches, he had to learn the meaninglessness of it all without God/Christ and that this is just His temporary time of testing and preparation, for what lies ahead for us, and in how we will manage what He has entrusted us with.]

Jesus, in His "Sermon on the Mount" said, to **"not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven...For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good [what is your focus, I or I AM?], your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. [as was with Solomon, so it is with us] Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble."** (Matthew 6:19-34)

The pleasures of this world are but vanity, meaningless, for the most part. Yet, contrary to that, Jesus said **"I AM the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I AM the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep."** (John 10:9-11) Amen.