

VANITY VERSUS AN ABUNDANT LIFE IN CHRIST, PT. 3 (ECCLESIASTES 3)

Ecclesiastes 1:1 begins by saying, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem." King Solomon refers to himself as the "Preacher" which is actually the "qoheleth". Qoheleth means a gatherer, collector or assembler, which can then mean one who gathers collections of wisdom, as would seem be the case with Solomon. It can also mean the assembling of people, to then hear those said sayings of wisdom. For 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 (transliteration) 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.

Now King Solomon is said to have "surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom" (**1 Kings 10:23**), and also, **1 Kings 4:32** we are told, that he "spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five". Last week we read from **chapter 2**, where Solomon, in **verses 4-11**, described how he pursued greatness, saying "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 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. [up until then anyways] 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." Vanity="hebel"=emptiness, futile, meaningless.¹ He concluded that chapter by saying, "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. [In other words, there's nothing wrong with enjoying the simple pleasures in life in eating and drinking, and benefitting in one's labors. In fact, God blesses us with such things. Thank You Lord!] 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." (**Ecclesiastes 2:24-26**) "For God gives wisdom

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

and knowledge and **joy** to a man **who is good in His sight**". That is a key statement to understanding what Solomon is ultimately getting at. Gathering and collecting in and of itself can be a benign activity, meaning it has "little or no detrimental effect"². Yet the issue can become malignant, that is, "tending to produce death or deterioration"³, based on the motive and goal and perspective of the aforementioned gatherer or collector. Initially, Solomon's gathering of wisdom was in his heart and he had a reason for wanting wisdom. We can read of how Solomon began, where it says in **1 Kings 3:3**, "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**) That may seem insignificant, as we can assume that Solomon was sacrificing and burning incense to God alone, initially. Yet, that was intended for the priests to do. (Saul) Nevertheless, we are told that 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 that because he didn't ask for a long life, or riches, or the life of his enemies that He would give him 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**).

What started out with Solomon loving God and wanting wisdom to rule God's people, as we just read, Solomon had a case of the "I's". He also, through disobedience, as slight as it may have seemed, by sacrificing and burning incense on the high places, he allowed a door to be opened, so to speak, for that situation to grow worse, for what was benign, to become malignant. While Solomon said that his wisdom remained with him through the pursuing of all of what he then said was vanity, we can read in **1 Kings 11:3-4**, that Solomon didn't stop at collecting what has already been mentioned, as he had "seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart [from God]. For it was so, when **Solomon was old**, that his wives turned his heart after other gods [that means that if he indeed repented and then wrote Ecclesiastes, he was at that point older than old; meaning for us, it's not too late to get right with God, until it is too late]; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David." Here is another example of the disobedience of Solomon that led from the benign collecting to a malignant disaster. God said through Moses that for the kings that they were not to "acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold." (**Deuteronomy 17:17**)

² <https://www.wordnik.com/words/benign>

³ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/malignant>

Yet, in all of Solomon's collecting, we have preserved for us what is now called the book of Proverbs, of which he authored or inspired most of that, but we can see a distinct difference between his writings and thoughts with his father David's. For instance, in **Psalms 16:1-3**, David says "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust. O my soul, you have said to the Lord, "You are my Lord, my goodness is nothing apart from You." As for the saints who are on the earth, "They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight."" I'm not speculating on what Solomon's relationship was with God from beginning to end, but once again, the difference between the Psalms of David and the Proverbs are radical. While the Proverbs are valuable to us in obtaining wisdom from God, it all means a whole lot of nothing without an active relationship with God! Therefore, we do have Solomon as an example in seeking after wisdom from God. As the Apostle Paul tells us, "Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are **futile.**" (**1 Corinthians 3:18-20**) Sound familiar? ""Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (**Ecclesiastes 1:2**) "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies."(**1 Cor.8:1**)

From David, we have as an example of one who continued to seek God, in the good and the bad. Most notably, we have what is said to be David's prayer after his sin with Bathsheba and his allowing Uriah, her husband, to be killed in battle. David prays, "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge...Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part **You will make me to know wisdom.** Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit. Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, And sinners shall be converted to You." (**Psalms 51:1-4, 6-13**) We can only presume, based on Ecclesiastes, that Solomon also got right with God in the end, as he finished the book of Ecclesiastes by saying, "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". (**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**) Combining then the wisdom of the

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes with the Psalms of David, gives us what the Apostle Paul told the church at Corinth. "For you see your **calling**, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has **chosen** the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise ["**many are called but few are chosen**" (Matthew 22:14)], and God has **chosen** the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But **of Him you are in Christ Jesus**, who became for us Wisdom from God—and Righteousness and Sanctification and Redemption— that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Now that we've considered all of that, it can now be said, as we are in the time of the "New Covenant" that is in Christ, that Jesus is THE QOHELETH, as He is THE GATHERER of the assembly (qahal) of God's people! Jesus began His ministry saying to those who would be His disciples "**Come follow Me!**" Then, after Jesus' time of suffering, death on a cross, and resurrection, He then gave His disciples what we now call the Great Commission, saying, "**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples [to follow Him] of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.**" (Matthew 28:18-20) As THE QOHELETH, Jesus lamented, "**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!**" (Matthew 23:37) Yet for those who are willing Jesus says, "**I am the Good Shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the Shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. [Meaning, there is no one who cares more about you than Him, our Good Shepherd!] I AM the Good Shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.**" [Do you know Him, does He know you? Is He knocking on the door of your heart and saying "**Let Me in!**" As Jesus said in Revelation 3:20, "**Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.**"] As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and **one Shepherd.**" (John 10:11-16) Jesus is presently, even now, calling to His sheep "**Come follow Me!**" We are then to follow Him AND to obey Him, and...then also, as Jesus said "**Abide [meno: abide, continue, dwell, remain] in Me, and I in you.**" As the branch cannot bear fruit

of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned." (John 15:4-6) Prior to that, 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)

His Word/commandments are summed in what Jesus said is the Great Commandments of God, to love Him with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind and to also 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. That is then what leads us into "Communion/Fellowship with Christ" (Greek koinonia: in fellowship, sharing, contribution, participation). 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." In that fellowship that we have in Christ we then bear the fruit of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, patience [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. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Galatians 5:22-25) Similarly, Paul said in 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/without-saved, a "spiritual wastefulness due to excessive behavior and the dire consequences it brings."⁴ From benign to malignant. We are to be abiding in Christ, following Him, and obeying Him. Those are all intrinsically tied together as the will of God! **[Ecclesiastes 3:1-8]** To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a time to kill [not other people], and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a

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

time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to 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 to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate [Proverbs 8:13, "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil; Pride and arrogance and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate." We are hating evil, not the people who do evil. As Jesus said, "I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:44-45)]; a time of war, and a time of peace. [Based on the will of God, we are meant to ALWAYS be His peacemakers. As Jesus said in His "Sermon on the Mount", "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Matt. 5:9)]

[Ecclesiastes 3:9-11] What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its 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. [In Isaiah 46:8-10, God says, "Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, o you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure'". As the saying goes, we aren't supposed to be getting God on our plan, and we are not intended to just do whatever strikes our fancy, living the life of a fool, so to speak, as Solomon would say, as he said in Ecclesiastes 2:13-14, "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." Jesus, who is referred to also as the Chief Cornerstone, of what God is presently building spiritually, the Apostle Peter says, "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. ["many are called but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14)] 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) By the grace and mercies of God, we are being led to, and are intended to, seek out and get on His plan. That is, to know Him and His will for our lives and not waste it on what is ultimately meaningless. That doesn't mean we can't enjoy the simple pleasures in life. But as the Apostle Paul said, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of

God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved." (1 Corinthians 1:31-33) Yet if someone is to be offended by us, may it only be because of Christ in us! As Solomon continues:]

[Ecclesiastes 3:12-14a] 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**. I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. [Yet it is now revealed to us that we have the greatest gift of all in Christ Jesus. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the **gift of God**, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for **good works**, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Also, we have the awesome privilege of being part of God's building of His eternal kingdom as we are called to share and show the love and the gospel of Christ Jesus (Great Commission and Great Commandments) Then, of what God plans to do, Solomon says:]

[Ecclesiastes 3:14b-15] Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.

[Ecclesiastes 3:16-22] Moreover I saw under the sun: in the place of judgment, wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, iniquity was there. I said in my heart, "**God shall judge the righteous and the wicked**, for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work." 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." For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. [sometimes people even act like animals] 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? So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should **rejoice in his[His] own works**, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?

[The Apostle Paul encourages us in **1 Corinthians 15:58** by saying, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the **work of the Lord**, knowing that **your labor is not in vain in the Lord**." "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)] Praise the Lord! Amen.