

VANITY VERSUS AN ABUNDANT LIFE IN CHRIST, PT. 4 (ECCLESIASTES 4)

We are now in week four of our reading of the book of Ecclesiastes. While I must confess that I did not want to continue in Ecclesiastes, since we have gotten what could be considered a fair enough portion of insight into what Solomon was getting at, as we have gleaned from his wisdom that was given to him by God. I also didn't want to repeat "ad nauseum" Solomon's words of "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." (**Ecclesiastes 1:2**) Vanity="hebel"=emptiness, futile, meaningless.¹ It can be deduced, by close examination of what Solomon was ultimately saying, that he was using hyperbole (over-the-top wording) similar to what Jesus sometimes did, such as when He said "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell [gehenna, "Valley of [the sons of] Hinnom.]" (**Matthew 5:29**) Yet, despite the sobering words of Solomon, and his arguably, dispiriting tone, and regarding Solomon's shortcomings, of which he didn't seem to heed to enough being enough in his collecting of silver and gold and wives and concubines, we can still get much more from the one whom God had said to him, "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." (**1 Kings 3:12**)

Solomon summarizes for us all of his great accomplishments in **chapter 2**, saying he did this and that and this and that, I, me, my, I, I, I, my, my, my. While Solomon had developed a case of the "I's", the wisdom from God led him to conclude 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. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? [ok, so he wasn't quite over himself yet. As the saying goes, "but wait, there's more", for then he says:] 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**) Eating and drinking, gathering and collecting in and of themselves can be what are termed "benign activities", 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 personj who is eating and drinking, gathering and collecting. As Solomon admitted in chapter 2, "I made myself great...", so on and so forth. With that perspective, as we can see, will lead someone to say, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Having the right perspective. Solomon tells us in **Proverbs 9:10**, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is

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

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

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

understanding." **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." **Proverbs 1:7**, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction." We'll see as we go along that the "fear of the Lord" is JUST the beginning of wisdom. The Apostle John gives us the Word to where we are going, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." (**1 John 4:18**)

We are initially told that "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**) Unfortunately, Solomon confessed, "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." (**Ecclesiastes 2:3**) But then 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." As we have looked at what was initially God's abundant blessings on Solomon, it led to the progression or downfall of King Solomon, with his vast collecting of riches and women and turning to folly and drink. What began as benign (without adverse consequences) manifested into a malignant nightmare, so to speak, to where Solomon lost most of his kingdom, which was taken from him after his reign, and only one of the twelve tribes of Israel remained for his son Rehoboam. We can but presume though, from the writing of Ecclesiastes, that he repented before God. Once again, the same applies to us, it is not too late to repent of one's sins and turn back to God for the forgiveness of our sins against Him, until it IS too late.

For review, **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 the Hebrew word "qoheleth". Qoheleth means a gatherer/collector/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. Relevant then, is the root of that word "qoheleth", as it is "qahal", which is used for the "assembly" of God's people. Also, this book is called "Ecclesiastes", which is from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, and Ecclesiastes is 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.

We can gain an understanding from Solomon, as the "qoheleth", that in his heaps and scads of what he collected, that became to him

meaningless, and we hopefully will learn that we don't have to be pursuing after what he called, the "grasping of the wind", as we are given an even greater example TO follow. The Apostle Paul explained in **1 Corinthians** how the Israelites were given of the spiritual food (manna) and the spiritual water (from the rock), saying "all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness." (**1 Corinthians 10:3-5**) Then he says, "Now these things became our examples [you can include Solomon and Ecclesiastes in that], to the intent that we should not **lust** after evil things as they also lusted. And do not become **idolaters** as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play." Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. **Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.** No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." (**1 Corinthians 10:6-13**) "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. " (**1 Peter 5:8**)

Now then, as we are in the "New Covenant" that is in Christ, as opposed to the time of King Solomon, where the Israelites were in the Old Covenant based on the law of God given through Moses, we are told that "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the **Spirit of life in Christ Jesus** has made me free from the law of sin and death." (**Romans 8:1-2**) "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (**Romans 8:12-14**) The message ultimately is the same for us as what God told the Israelites, to "love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them." (**Deut. 30:20**) Yet now, we have been given the revelation of Christ Jesus, of God's redemptive plan of salvation for mankind is through Him. But not just salvation. The same was the message to the Israelites, although for the most part they didn't get it. God IS to be our one and only God, and our Lord, and our Savior,

and our Deliverer, and our Heavenly Father! Then, as Jesus said, **"I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** (John 14:6) He was not just referring to a one-time salvation experience. We are now given the truth that is in Christ that Jesus is THE QOHELETH, as He is THE GATHERER of the assembly (qahal) of God's people! Even before we get to chapter 4, what I consider to be the takeaway from Ecclesiastes is that it can be said that God gave Solomon the keys to the kingdom on earth, to which he concluded, "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Contrary to that, what has been a much misunderstood passage of Scripture, yet the truth is in the context, Jesus asked His disciples who they thought He was, and "Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered and said to him, **"Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter [a rock], and on this Rock [boulder] I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."** Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ. (Matthew 16:16-20) While Christ Jesus alone is the Rock, the point I am intending to make is Jesus saying **"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven"**. The Apostle Paul tells us, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and **joint heirs with Christ**, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:16-18) Also, Paul told Timothy, "If we endure, We shall also **reign with Him**." (2 Timothy 2:12) Then also, we are reminded that, "whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ." (Colossians 3:23-24)

Jesus began His ministry saying to those who would be His disciples **"Come follow Me!"** Then, after Jesus' time of ministry, 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.** 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**) Do you know Him, does He know you? Or 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."

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[Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 (Life's Oppressions and Inequalities)]

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**. Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, more than the living who are still alive. Yet, better than both is he who has never existed, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.

[Jesus said, "**If you love Me, keep My commandments.** And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper [parakletos: para-beside, kletos-makes a call (the perfect lawyer); intercessor, consoler, advocate, comforter], 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, Jesus says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." 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 14:21-24**) Then later, as Jesus told His disciples that His time had come, He assured them "These things I have spoken to you, that **in Me you may have peace.** In the world you will have **tribulation**; but be of good cheer, **I have overcome the world.**" (**John 16:33**)

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. But we are not just following the letter of the law, in legalism, we are following Christ in Communion/Fellowship with Him! It is the Greek word "koinonia": 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 [as He IS 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**)

[Ecclesiastes 4:1-3 (Life's Oppressions and Inequalities)]

The Vanity of Selfish Toil

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. The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.

["Consumes his own flesh" is hyperbole, describing what begins as benign indulgence that becomes a malignant disaster. Jesus said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, **covetousness**, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, **foolishness**. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." (**Mark 7:18-23**)

[Ecclesiastes 4:7-12 (The Value of a Friend)]

Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun: 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. Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. 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.

[Jesus suffered and died on a cross, taking our sins upon Himself, and conquered death, sin and evil so that we too can overcome that "sting of death", and also overcome sin and evil, so that we are brought into a right relationship with God and that we may have fellowship (koinonia) with our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus, our Heavenly Father and with one another, for all of eternity! That is the threefold cord that is not quickly broken! And Jesus said to His disciples, and is also saying to us, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that **your joy may be full**. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you." (John 15:11-15)] To further clarify, we won't know ALL that God is doing, but we know that God is perfect in all of His Ways (2 Samuel 22:31) and His Works (Deuteronomy 32:4). God promises, "So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it." (Isaiah 55:11) "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" (1 Cor. 15:58), and then as Solomon said, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)

[Ecclesiastes 4:13-16 (Popularity Passes Away)]

Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more. 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. 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.

[Whether one is a king or a pauper, what applies to us all, the Apostle Paul says, "For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, **we are the Lord's**. For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living...Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another." (Romans 14:7-13, 19) "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)]