

Reality Check – Too Smart

2/13/22

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 | 2:12-16

Sunday AM

I'm sure you've heard some version of this story – but (4) people were on plane – the **smartest** man in the world, the **richest** man in the world, a humble pastor, and a young boy. As fate would have it, the plane experienced engine trouble and was going to crash. W/out any concern for his passengers, the pilot grabbed one of the (4) parachutes and exited the plane. W/ (3) chutes remaining, the **richest** man in the world decided he was too influential, so he took a chute and jumped. Next, the **smartest** man in the world took a chute and said, “The world can't function w/out my intellect – and he jumped. Realizing the situation, the old, humble pastor insisted the boy take the final chute. But the boy said, "That won't be necessary, the smartest man in the world just took my backpack."

You know – sometimes in life, people can be too smart for their own good. They can be as smart as a whip, yet as dumb as a brick. They can have immense knowledge, yet have no common sense. And all-too-often, they can know most everything, yet miss the most apparent truths staring them in the face.

Butch Kendall said something this week I thought was quite good. He said – *There's a big difference b/w knowledge/wisdom. Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit, while wisdom is the recognizing that no one should put a tomato in a fruit salad.*

Indeed, **sometimes we can be too smart for our own good** – this is especially true of people when it comes to the existence/reality of God. Too often, in our pursuit of intelligence, some people find too much pleasure in wanting to prove that either God doesn't exist or that they're smarter than God.

Such was the case for people like *Charles Schutz, C.S. Lewis, Josh McDowell, Lee Strobel* – and so many more... who spent their lives as atheist/agnostics until one day they finally wised-up and gave their lives to faith in God. But think of the number of intellectuals who've refused to bend their knees, bow their hearts, and believe in God. And for each one who has stepped into eternity w/out God only to discover what Solomon forewarned – that those who trust in their intellect here living *life under the sun* – they'll soon discover that it was pure vanity and w/out profit b/c life under the sun w/out God is meaningless/hopeless.

Last week, we started a series of lessons from the book of **Ecclesiastes** entitled – **Reality Check**.

A reality check is the process of comparing one's flawed ideas, opinions, and misconceptions w/ the actual facts/reality of a situation that they might actually **see the truth**. And now, maybe more than ever – our world is in serious need of a **reality check**.

For I fear T.S. Elliot was correct when he said – *Mankind cannot bear too much reality!*

And so, understanding this about His creation, God used a man named Solomon to write a book about the reality of **life under the sun** – to teach us that there is nothing this side of heaven (not one ISM) that can bring lasting fulfillment/satisfaction to our soul – b/c all this world has to offer is *meaningless* w/out God.

AAR – thru Solomon's experience/wisdom we learn that unless we begin w/ the assumption that **God IS** – the question of life's purpose is meaningless and w/out value. For if God IS – then **everything** has purpose.

This AM, I want to turn our attention to one of man's favorite pursuits to help us to see that no matter how smart we are (or think we are), **no one can outsmart God** – and no amount of human intellectualism can satisfy the God-shaped hole inside of us.

Listen to Solomon – considered the wisest of us all...

I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek/search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered. I communed w/ my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

Then I turned myself to consider wisdom, 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 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 happens to me, and why was I then wiser?" 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 is now will be forgotten in the days to come. How does a wise man die? As the fool! Ecclesiastes 2:12-16

I Solomon's **QUEST** of Knowledge

I set my heart to seek/search out by wisdom concerning all that's done under heaven...

Solomon declared that he gave himself fully to the pursuit of knowledge (void of God) as a means to find fulfillment in life only to find that it didn't scratch the itch, satisfy his soul, or answer the questions he most needed answered about life.

He set out w/ the belief that he could find meaning and value thru learning – believing he could solve the questions of the universe absent of God.

We're still doing this today. Think about it... in man's search for the secrets of the universe, he has drummed up all kinds of theories to explain our origin, the problem of evil and the need for morality. Yet in a world void of God, where man came from nothing, there is NO such thing as right/wrong or good/evil.

The simple reality is that a basic search for true truth and an explanation for the presence of good/evil can only lead to a conclusion that there's something out there greater than man. And if we too attempt to nix God from the equation, we too will discover the same result as Solomon. Life doesn't work w/out God.

Consider the sum total of all our knowledge, progress, and technology. **Has it really made the experience of life richer?** NO! In fact, you could make the case that it's only quickened our ability to make a mess of things. Just look at the abuse of one another on social media or watch the news to see the injustice and sinful actions of people running rampant.

This doesn't mean we can't be thankful to God for medical advances, jet travel, and other helpful advances; **yet none of these have solved the fallenness of man or the depravity of the human heart.** There is no science of man that addresses the need for God.

I think of a poem I read once mocking Psalm 23 – Science is my shepherd; I shall not want. It makes me to lie down on foam rubber; It leads me upon super highways and into the psychiatrist's office for my ego's sake. Yea, though I walk thru the valley of the hydrogen bomb, I will fear no evil; for thy hast provided jets/rockets to comfort me; Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of the world's billion hungry people; and thou anointest my head w/ home perms; my alcoholic cup runneth over. Surely, social security and Medicare shall follow me all the days of my life; and I'll die w/out hope into hell forever.

Point. In spite of our advances, there's never been so many unhappy, broken lives – so many who are hungry, diseased, misused, and disowned. For all of our accumulated knowledge, it can't keep us from terrorism, war/discord or solve the issues of the heart.

Even as I stand here this AM. My heart is broken for this family in our community who has experienced this inexplicable tragedy. And while I understand this is a result of living in a fallen world where one man's sinful actions have had consequences on another soul, there's no amount of knowledge that can soothe this situation nor answer some of life's greatest questions.

And if I'm being honest, even if we add God into the equation and ask – WHY God? I'm not certain there's a satisfactory explanation other than in spite of this tragedy – God is good – and He will be present.

Nonetheless – more knowledge vacant of God is NOT the answer. No matter how much we spend on COVID – people will get sick. No matter how much knowledge we have about marriage/family – family will still face difficulty. No matter how clever we are about anything – we're never find the answers in the human intellect.

Solomon's discovery is simple – no one (not even one person) can solve the issues, mysteries, or challenges of life thru more knowledge/education absent of God.

II Solomon's **CONCLUSION** of Knowledge

this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I've seen all the works that are done under the sun; and all is vanity – grasping for the wind. What's crooked can't be made straight; what's lacking can't be numbered

Solomon explains that what he's learned is that no matter how much he's realized about life and how it works *under the sun* – it's all meaningless w/out God.

A It's a **GRIEVIUS** Task

Simply put – it's a lousy job. B/c it never works out. It never makes sense. It never adds up.

B It's **GRASPING** after the Wind

It's pursuing the unattainable – ambition w/out hope.

C It's **GETTING** results that are Broken

It's accepting we're incapable of straightening out life.

WTM – I'm compelled to remind you that Solomon was a pretty smart guy. In fact, God had blessed him w/ wisdom greater than any other person. (**1 Kings 3**)

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Solomon said, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, b/c he was faithful to you and righteous – upright in heart. You have continued this kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day. "Now, Lord, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count. So, give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish b/w right/wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" The Lord was pleased Solomon had asked for this. So, God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in

administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise/discerning heart, so there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. 1 Kings 3:5-12

W/out question – *when Solomon spoke of the pursuit of knowledge as a means of satisfying one's soul* – he knew what he was talking about. And his conclusion was – there's no amount of education or knowledge **absent of God** that'll bring fulfillment to one's life.

BUT should we start w/ God – then knowledge can be our friend to help us navigate life under the sun. Thus, it's not the pursuit of knowledge but the pursuit of knowledge absent of God that's the real issue.

In fact, I'd submit to you that we all have a calling and obligation to steward our minds under God thru Scripture. *We are to study to show ourselves approved – and we are to hide His Word in our hearts.*

5 Truths about the Pursuit of Godly Knowledge

- 1 God expects us to apply our minds to learn everything He has given us the capacity to know
- 2 Use everything you learn to glorify God/help others
- 3 Sin, and not ignorance, is man's greatest threat
- 4 No matter how much you learn, there will always be more to know
- 5 Living by the revealed Word of God is the beginning of wisdom – and it is far superior to living by human wisdom

TAKEAWAYS

In spite of all of mankind's advances and increased knowledge/education absent of God, we have yet to solved the issues, mysteries, or challenges of life that flow from a depraved heart living in a fallen world.

God expects us to apply our minds to learning everything He has given us the capacity to know.

Living by the revealed Word of God is the beginning of wisdom – far superior to living by human wisdom.

NEXT STEPS

1 Spend time this week in your quiet time or with another person discussing these GROW questions.

G – Who is the smartest person you know? Why?

R – Read **Ecclesiastes 1:12-18**. What do we learn about the pursuit of knowledge apart from God?

O – What does it mean – *what's crooked cannot be made straight?*

W – Make a renewed commitment this week to spend time each day reading God's Word?

2 Pray this week for people you know who think they are smarter than God.