

Sermon Notes: Ecclesiastes #2 – The “Folly” of Gospel Wisdom

Text: Ecclesiastes 1:12–18 (NKJV) — 12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I set my heart to seek and 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. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. 15 What is crooked cannot be made straight, And what is lacking cannot be numbered. 16 I communed with 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.” 17 And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. 18 For in much wisdom is much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Take Away: *The greatest thing for man to obtain is wisdom. Wisdom is more precious than gold and more to be desired than rubies. It is superior to all other things that can be gained by man under the sun. Yet, to use wisdom as a means of gaining full control of God’s world under the sun is also hevel. The end of the road of wisdom apart from Christ is grief. Only in the seeming “foolishness” of the gospel is true life giving wisdom found.*

I. What does it mean to be “under the sun”?: (References: Acts 4:27-28; Luke 24:25-27; Proverbs 8:27-30)

II. What is Solomon’s main question?: (References: Genesis 3:17-19; 1 Kings 3:23-27)

III. What is true gospel wisdom?: (References: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

Review:

1. **The Preacher is King Solomon the Son of David.** Here in Ecclesiastes Solomon is taking up his kingly position as the *qoheleth*, the “assembler” of the people of Israel such that he might preach the truth of God to them. Ecclesiastes was most likely a sermon that Solomon preached and was written down. I argued that this Book of Wisdom was not a “confessions” style memoir of Solomon’s later slip into apostasy, but an official teaching from Solomon as the Shepherd-King and the man of wisdom. Ecclesiastes itself means “speaker to the assembly.” It is the Greek word used for the Hebrew *qoheleth*.
2. **Vanity isn’t the best translation of the Hebrew word hevel.** The word *hevel* is at the heart of Solomon's teaching in Ecclesiastes. *Hevel* should not be thought of primarily as “moral excess” or “meaninglessness,” but how God’s world can not be subjected to totalizing human control. *Hevel* is better understood as vapor, mist, or shepherding the wind. Solomon’s main point in the book is that while human beings desire totalizing control of reality, only God can uphold the universe by the word of His power. Man simply does not have the capacity to accomplish this nor does the reality of death and chance allow it under the sun. Remember that the first mention of the word *hevel* comes to us in the name *Abel*. Abel’s shocking murder by Cain underscores man’s inability to save himself from the curse of sin and death. Only God can bring it about through His sovereign will and purpose.
3. **Lastly, we saw how Ecclesiastes is ultimately a book of faith.** One of the greatest gifts that God has given man is access to wisdom. Yet wisdom under the sun—if sought as a means of totalizing control of God’s world—is also *hevel*. Wisdom above the sun is trusting in the only One in this world that is really nailed down—that is solid as a rock—and that is Jesus Christ. He is the fullness of knowledge and wisdom and it is profoundly wise to, in humility, cast ourselves upon Him in faith. It is the gospel, that is foolishness to the Gentiles and a stumbling block to the Jews, where true life changing wisdom is found.

Questions for the Table:

1. Read Job 42:1-6. How does Solomon’s distinction of being *under the sun* help us when it comes to trust in God?
2. Discuss how our totalizing narratives we tell ourselves under the sun have a *worship* component. If you believe that getting the next pay raise will fix all your problems, how does that affect you as a worshiper?
3. How has the Fall made things even more difficult under the sun when pursuing the wisdom God has woven into the world?
4. Why is it that those who increase in knowledge under the sun increase in sorrow? Do we see such examples in our modern world today?
5. Read chapter 12 of *The Silver Chair*. How is Puddleglum, who is just a common Marshwiggle, someone who displays deep, rich, gospel wisdom in confronting the Witch? Does one need to be a genius to have rich, thick, gospel wisdom that can stand up to the philosophers of the world?
6. Why is the gospel *foolishness* to the worldly-wise? Why is humility a precondition to real wisdom?