

Sermon Notes: Ecclesiastes #4 — The Good Life According to Solomon

Text: Ecclesiastes 2:12–26 (NKJV) — 12 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. 13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly As light excels darkness. 14 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. 15 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." 16 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! 17 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. 18 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. 19 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. 20 Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. 21 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. 22 For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? 23 For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. 24 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. 25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? 26 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.

Take Away: *Not everything under the sun is equal, even if all of it is hevel. Wisdom is better than folly. One will live a better life under the sun following wisdom than rejecting her. But Solomon will reiterate that even wisdom, if followed only under the sun, is also hevel. Why? Because both the fool and wise both die alike. Death comes for both of them. This leads Solomon to lament that at his death he might have to leave his works to a fool after him. But there is hope. The way to live The Good Life is to enjoy what God has given you today. In particular, the table given by God of wine and bread.*

I. Is Wisdom better than Folly?: (References: Ecclesiastes 7:17; Proverbs 14:1, 17:12, 26:11, 18:6-7; Proverbs 3:13-18)

II. “But, what about a legacy?”: (References: 2 Chronoicles 13:7)

III. What is The Good Life according to Solomon?: (References: Proverbs 15:17; Psalm 39:3-5)

Review:

1. ***Last time we looked at the most common objection to Solomon's claim that all is hevel under the sun.*** This was the objection from pleasure. Certainly if we had all the money and resources to purchase or do whatever we wanted under the sun we would be living The Good Life. Certainly those who have such a life have "made it". They are safe and secure. They have constant happiness. They have found out how to live without pain and anxiety in this life. Solomon tested what we would call Epicureanism and Hedonism while being guided by wisdom. What he did not pursue was the worship of pleasure. The pleasure cults of Ancient Near East required one to abandon wisdom and self-possession. You were to lose yourself in it—think of the prophets of Ba'al before Elijah trying to call their god. Solomon will reject that road as not worth being tested.
2. ***Next we saw that Solomon proves pleasure under the sun to be hevel.*** More than anyone else, Solomon had the ability and resources to test the philosophy of pleasure. He has gone further down the road than anyone else. And at the end of the road, when he looked at all he had done, he still found it crooked and lacking. It did not give him satisfaction. It did provide him safety and security. In fact, it brought more anxieties because Solomon realized he would have to give all he had to another, and what if that person is a fool and ruins all he built? Yet, Solomon does give us another distinction: there is pleasure to be found in the labor but not in the end result under the sun. Work is good for man and we kind find much pleasure in enjoying what God has given us to do today.
3. ***Lastly, we looked where true pleasure can be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ.*** Christians might take Solomon here and just hold up our hands, "What is the point then?" Is Buddhism correct and we just need to purge ourselves of all desires? Is The Good Life in the absence of desire? The answer of course comes by the way of wisdom above the sun. Christians are people who feast and people who fast. We do this because God's pleasure can be found in both ways. When we build our lives, as Jesus directs, upon Him then all things work for good for those who love Him. Because Christ is not subjected to hevel, He is the only thing nailed down in this world. When we labor in Christ then we have the ability to enjoy the pleasure of His grace given to us today.

Questions for the Table:

1. Why is following down the road of Folly ultimately harming oneself? Can you think of times when you have followed down the road of folly and been burned by it?
2. What are some of the traps of *leaving a legacy* that people fall into? Have you been tempted to place your hope and security in a legacy? Have you watched someone lose their legacy after building it their whole life?
3. Have you noticed how things that were meant by man to leave a legacy—say a grand palace—can be forgotten, while something that was not made for that intention, say a plate, watch, or vase do? How does this underscore that it is God who gives a legacy to something or someone?
4. What is Solomon's answer for living The Good Life? Compare his answer with what Jesus says in Matthew 6:25-34.
5. Are you currently allowing sin to rob you of The Good Life according to Solomon?
6. Why is that Solomon concludes—perhaps commands—us to *eat, drink, and enjoy our labor*? How has God given our eating and drinking at the Lord's Table as a fulfillment of that?
7. How has God, in his good providence, changed the *legacy* of the symbol of the cross?