



The following is the summary of the Sunday sermon that is sent to the body at Steadfast in an email called "The Weekly"

Ecclesiastes 2

The Futility of Hedonism and Materialism

The Futility of Pleasure-Seeking (Hedonism) 2:1-11

vv. 1-2—here Solomon, using the form of a monologue, announces the goal and the conclusion of his experiment in hedonism—seeking pleasure as a goal in and of itself.

v. 3—here Solomon explains how he went about this. He permitted his mind to be affected by wine and willfully sought a lifestyle of foolish and frivolous living. His questions: Are hedonism (pleasure-seeking) and frivolity worthwhile? Can they be beneficial to me as a human? Is there a purpose to them? [ASK: Is there a place for pleasure? For frivolity?—if the box is not closed?]

vv. 4-10—The experiment itself. Because he was wealthy, he denied himself nothing (see 1 Kings 4:20-34):

- v. 4—building projects and vineyards (see 1 Kings 9:10—13 years to build the king's palace; a house for pharaoh's daughter, his first wife; he also built the cities of Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Beth-horon, Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness)
- vv. 5-6—luxuriant parks, gardens and reservoirs to water these parks
- v. 7—slaves to serve him and meet his needs, as well as massive herds of animals (see 1 Kings 9:26-28)
- v. 8—wealth as measured by gold and silver (see 1 Kings 10:14-29; 2 Chronicles 1:15); a harem to serve his sexual pleasures, and singers to suit his aesthetic needs
- v. 9—no one was greater than he in all these areas; yet, he maintained his pursuit with wisdom (see v. 9b)
- v. 10—he tested the very limits of self-indulgence —"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure."

v. 11—Conclusion: No meaning; only pursuing wind, but never catching it; nothing was gained under the sun. ASK: What brings meaning to all these things? If the box is not closed,

what is the purpose and meaning of all these things?

The Futility of Materialism [in light of death], 2:12-23

v. 12—here Solomon wants to test the two extremes of the human condition—wisdom on the one end and foolishness on the other. (The king [i.e., Solomon] had done it all and there was nothing left to do).

vv. 13-14—It is obvious that wisdom is better than folly. The wise man sees the dangers and avoids them, whereas the fool does not. But this begs the question, why be wise, because both die?

v. 15—why then be wise? What sense does that make? Perhaps it really is better to eat, drink and be merry, because tomorrow we die. If the box is closed, then why be wise? Is it not in fact “wiser” to be a fool?

v. 16—for both the wise and the fool, everyone will forget them. Why then be wise?

v. 17—“I hated life.” There seems to be no reason to work hard, to be wise—it is ultimately, in light of death, meaningless!!

v. 18—Solomon now offers an eternal perspective about the fruits of all his work “under the sun.” There is no permanence to these fruits and besides, he must leave them to his heirs.

v. 19—he is not certain whether his heirs will be foolish or wise with his wealth—the fruits of his labor. In short, he will “have no control over anything” after he dies. He seems to be saying that he has been wise with his time and his resources. He has worked hard and has gained wealth. (We would say that he has worked hard, invested wisely and has a large nest egg—a well-balanced portfolio.) But now death stares him in the face and he asks, “Why have I worked so hard? I am about to die and pass it all on to my heirs and I cannot control what they will do.” They do not appreciate how hard he has worked for his wealth nor how wise he had been. This is meaningless!!

v. 20—this reality of v. 19 leads to despair!! Why?

v. 21—“wisdom, knowledge and skill” characterized his labor (“toil”) but now he must leave it to those who did not use “wisdom, knowledge or skill.” They just “inherit” his wealth. This is meaningless and “a great misfortune.” What does he mean by the last phrase—“a great misfortune?”

v. 22—if the box is closed, what do we get for all our hard work and “anxiety” done “under the sun?” Let’s look at Colossians 3:22–4:1 to get the eternal perspective on this question. What principles is Paul offering here to answer Solomon’s penetrating question?

- A demeanor and attitude of obedience, consistency and sincerity, v. 22
- The Lordship of Jesus, v. 23
- God will reward the faithful (an eternal dimension to our work), v. 24

v. 23—Solomon comments that there is not only hard work; there is anxiety, sleepless nights worrying. In short, “the mind never rests.” Solomon understood a profound point about our work—worry and anxiety often accompany our labor. Modern humanity understands this even more deeply!! What is the eternal perspective about anxiety and worry that accompanies work?

The Conclusion of the Argument, 2:24-26

v. 24—Solomon argues that humans must enjoy the fruits of toil and labor (“eat and drink”) and also find “satisfaction” (i.e., fulfillment) in work. He concludes that this comes from “the hand of God.”

v. 25—only God makes this possible. Apart from Him, there is no enjoyment!

v. 26—To those who please God, he gives “wisdom, knowledge and joy.” But to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and heaping up in order to give it to the one who pleases God. Solomon suggests that the “sinner” (obviously the one who is in rebellion against God) works and toils but ultimately the fruit of his labor is handed “over to the one who pleases”

God. This is therefore frustrating and "chasing after the wind."

Four principles emerge from 2:1-26. The question of 1:3 (what does life in and of itself profit a human being?) is now answered:

1. There is nothing inherently good in human beings.
2. No one can appreciate such elementary things as eating and drinking apart from a personal relationship with the living God.
3. God alone—not material things or even wisdom—is the giver of satisfaction and joy.
4. God also gives wisdom, knowledge and joy to those who please Him.

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