

Lesson 2

Ecclesiastes

Lesson 2 (2:1-3:15)

1. **Vanity of pleasure (2:1-11).**

- a. The Preacher describes a promise he made from his mind to his heart.
- b. The promise was that his unsatisfied heart would soon be tested to see how it would respond to being given over to full enjoyment and all manner of pleasure.
- c. The term “mirth” indicates exceeding joy and ultimate satisfaction (not to be confused with myrrh).
- d. The Preacher’s flesh instructed his heart to enjoy all this pleasure.
- e. However, the Preacher quickly discovers that this pursuit of pleasure is vanity.
- f. The Preacher offers his conclusion concerning mirth.
 - i. Laughter, taken to the extreme, turns to madness (this made him look foolish).
 - ii. Mirth, as a pursuit, accomplishes nothing that lasts for the heart to enjoy.
- g. Summary of his attempts to be satisfied with all manner of pleasure.
 - i. The Preacher let his heart (flesh) take the lead instead of his head (wisdom).
 - ii. He gave himself over to wine, but this proved to be vanity.
 - iii. He set his heart to know wisdom, as opposed to folly, to determine what is good for men, but discovered that eliminating folly by wisdom was also vanity.
 - iv. He made all his works great (excellent, strong, superior), including:
 1. Vineyards.
 2. Gardens.
 3. Orchards.
 4. Fruit trees.
 5. Water pools used to provide water for the trees.
 6. Acquiring many male and female servants.
 7. Many servants were born in his house.
 8. He had greater possessions of herds/flocks than all who came before him.
 9. He received ongoing shipments of gold, silver, and special treasures given by the kings of the provinces the Preacher ruled over (2 Chr. 9:13-28).
 10. He acquired talented male and female singers and musical instruments.
- h. Scripture affirms that the Preacher was greater than all who lived before him (and after?).
- i. He also retained his prized wisdom while he engaged in accumulating all his treasures.
- j. The Preacher never denied himself whatever he saw that he desired.
- k. If his heart wanted something, anything, he immediately satisfied that desire.
- l. His heart rejoiced with pride over his capacity to fulfill his every whim.
- m. As he reached the pinnacle of his achievements, the Preacher looked at all that he had and all that went into acquiring these things, but he was no longer satisfied.
- n. Indeed, the Preacher concluded that all that he had done to provide for himself was vanity.
- o. Since his heart was never satisfied, he was only grasping at the wind in futility.
- p. Whether he had all things or had nothing at all, his heart was never satisfied.
- q. He thereby proved beyond any doubt that his quest for pleasure was unprofitable and futile.

- r. Furthermore, no pursuit of this kind would ever be profitable, for it is vanity to think that man's heart could ever be satisfied by the things of this world, no matter how much temporal pleasure they may give.

2. Wisdom is good, but it is also vanity (2:12-16).

- a. The Preacher turned from pursuing the pleasures of his flesh to the exclusive pursuit of wisdom.
- b. Solomon was known for great wisdom, but he was not satisfied with the knowledge he had.
- c. He realized that being king was the top career of any person, so there was no place to aspire to once he ascended to the throne.
- d. Therefore, he wanted to gain all possible wisdom, knowing that he uniquely had the power and position to pursue his objective.
- e. The Preacher discovered that having wisdom is far better than engaging in folly, just as light is superior to darkness for those who desire to see clearly
- f. The wise man is able to see and understand things that the fool, who walks in the darkness of ignorance, will never see.
- g. The Preacher's wisdom led him to understand that both the wise and the fool ultimately experience the same fate.
- h. Therefore, the Preacher understood that wisdom is not the answer to finding ultimate satisfaction either; both the fool and the wise end up in the same condition of vanity.
- i. Therefore, the pursuit of wisdom is also vanity, even though wisdom is better than folly.
- j. The Preacher pessimistically concludes that the wise will not likely be remembered more than the fool after they both die (though Solomon is remembered today for wisdom).

3. Death continues the vanity of life (2:17-26).

- a. The Preacher considers his past work and future death in light of what he has discovered.
- b. This caused him to hate life and to be distressed over what his own future held.
- c. The vanity that comes from death seems more intolerable than the vanity that comes in life.
- d. Therefore, the Preacher hated all that he had worked to accomplish in his life because his upcoming death would mean that one of his heirs would inherit the fortunes of his labor.
- e. The Preacher lacked any confidence that his heir would not foolishly squander the inheritance that the Preacher worked to build (wealth, power, comfort).
- f. The Preacher sought wisdom, but his heir might well engage in foolish decisions that the Preacher's wisdom could not help him with (unless the heir learned from his wisdom).
- g. Therefore, death only offered vanity to the Preacher, for he could no longer protect all the good things he had labored all his life to obtain.
- h. This reality caused the Preacher to despair, for despite all his wisdom, he could not envision any truly lasting value for all of his labors under the sun.
- i. The one who did not labor for his possessions would assume responsibility for those things when he dies. This offers no comfort to the Preacher.
- j. He concludes that this is not only a great example of the vanity of life, but that it is also a great evil for his heart to consider.
- k. He further concludes that he was now sorrowful for all of his days on the earth and all that he had worked for because he found no solution to his philosophical dilemma.

- l. Thus, while the Preacher was consumed with this negative thinking, he ultimately concludes that both life and death result in vanity.
- m. The best he can now offer from this darkened perspective is that men should eat and drink to the fullest to enjoy the reward of labor before death removes any chance of enjoying them.
- n. The Preacher wonders if this was a blessing from God for him, for who could ever eat and take momentary pleasure out of this vain life more than Solomon himself?
- o. The Preacher wonders if perhaps God considers him to be good. If so, then God has rewarded him while the sinner is punished with no pleasure in life.
- p. This thought of God being pleased and having granted him rewards was rejected.
- q. The Preacher concludes again that this idea is also vanity, like grasping for the wind.

4. Considering the seasons in life (3:1-8).

- a. The Preacher considers the many seasons of life using a traditional parallelism format.
- b. Everything a man can experience in life fits into one of the seasons (appointed time or hour) described in the poem that follows.
- c. Thesis: There is a time for every purpose under heaven.
 - i. Life
 - 1. There is a time to be born.
 - 2. There is a time to die.
 - ii. Agriculture/provision.
 - 1. There is a time plant.
 - 2. There is a time to pluck what was planted.
 - iii. National and self-defense.
 - 1. There is a time kill.
 - 2. There is a time heal.
 - iv. Emotional reactions.
 - 1. There is a time to weep.
 - 2. There is a time to laugh.
 - 3. There is a time to mourn.
 - 4. There is a time to dance.
 - v. Labor (discernment).
 - 1. There is a time to gather stones.
 - 2. There is a time to cast away stones.
 - vi. Relationships.
 - 1. There is a time for embracing.
 - 2. There is a time to refrain from embracing.
 - vii. Finances.
 - 1. There is a time to gain.
 - 2. There is a time to lose.
 - viii. Family economics.
 - 1. There is a time to keep.
 - 2. There is a time to throw away.
 - ix. Care of garments.

1. There is a time to tear (mourning).
2. There is a time to sew.
- x. Communication and responsibility.
 1. There is a time to keep silent.
 2. There is a time to speak.
- xi. Interpersonal and national relations.
 1. There is a time to love.
 2. There is a time to hate.
 3. There is a time for war.
 4. There is a time for peace.

5. Proper response to God-given tasks (3:9-15).

- a. The Preacher asks a rhetorical question about men's labors – "What profit has the worker from that in which he labors?"
- b. Note that the primary occupations were in agriculture and livestock. Thus, profit was not in the daily wages earned, but in the delayed gratification that comes from providing for the needs of the family throughout the seasons.
- c. The Preacher has observed the God-given tasks of men (though as king, he had little direct experience with this lifestyle).
- d. Seeing everything from a big picture perspective, the Preacher declares that God has made everything beautiful in its time.
- e. All work is good and profitable if it is done according to God's will and purposes.
- f. God has put eternity in the hearts of men.
 - i. The souls of men know that there is more in eternity than can be experienced in life.
 - ii. This hope of eternity drives men to do the work God has appointed to them.
 - iii. Men cannot hope for what they don't know or that doesn't exist. The fact that most of humanity hopes for heaven is a testimony to its existence.
- g. While all men have eternity in their hearts, no man can discover the work that God does from beginning to end (unless God reveals it to him).
- h. The Preacher's instructions to the common man.
 - i. Rejoice in God-given work assignments and have hope for eternity.
 - ii. Do good in His sight.
 - iii. Eat, drink, and enjoy the rewards of their labor.
 - iv. All of these should be understood as gifts of God to them.
- i. The Preacher's understanding of God.
 - i. Whatever God does lasts forever.
 - ii. Nothing can be added to His work, and nothing can be taken from it.
 - iii. Men should fear God in awe and praise of His good work.
 - iv. Whatever happens today was already been declared by God.
 - v. Whatever the future holds has already been done in God's determined will.
 - vi. However, God will require an account of men for all they have done with His provisions and work assigned to them.