



MEANINGLESS

AUDIO DEVOTIONS

ON ECCLESIASTES

Wisdom Is Meaningless

(Ecclesiastes 1:16-18)

I thought to myself, “Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” ¹⁷ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸ For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

Several times in Ecclesiastes Solomon returns to the claim that wisdom itself is meaningless (1:16-18; 2:13-16; 8:16-18) but to read these words from the pen of the wisest person to have ever lived is somewhat perplexing. It seems so self-contradicting and self-defeating. We can't imagine Mozart saying the same about music or Einstein about physics! But Solomon is not instructing us to burn our books, close the libraries, and shut down our education system! We must keep in view the brand of wisdom Solomon is here critiquing. It is the limited, human, worldly wisdom that seeks to make sense of life on this side of heaven, the outer working of things done under the sun.

In discussing wisdom in Chapter 2, the Teacher adds this detail in favor of wisdom: “wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness” (v. 13-14). There are real practical benefits to knowledge and understanding and striving to figure out where and when to apply them. Investigation into the mechanisms of nature have given us great wonders that have drastically improved our quality of life: refrigeration, medicine, instant international communication, and travel. We've gained insight on the workings of our minds and bodies. We can calculate and predict how supply and demand will impact the economy.

But the more we investigate these blessed breakthroughs, the more we learn the bitter truth that our discoveries and solutions were not necessarily so good nor so wisely used as we'd hoped. As Solomon puts it, the increase of wisdom and knowledge are directly proportional to the increase of pain and grief. As a scholar grows in their understanding of world history, the more they see how humanity fails to learn from its mistakes and falls into the same old traps again and again. The more we learn of synthetic chemical compounds and their impact on the human health, the more we find that the very products that have revolutionized our world are also poisoning us. ...And so it goes on and on in every field of study that the more we uncover, the more we find we had wrong. It's all a consequence of our sin-brokenness in a sin-cursed world.

In addition, our personal quests for knowledge can only go so far. Scientists and philosophers may not want to admit it, but our knowledge of this universe and happenings here will ever and always remain fractional. No person, not even a genius like Solomon, can ever synthesize and comprehend it all—this life and world of ours are too wide, too varied, too deep. And would it even be possible (as some now aspire) to meld human consciousness with the internet and have the sum of human knowledge at one's fingertips, would he or she ever actually know what it means? To have endless data and observations does nothing to answer the question WHY? Why am I here? Why are things like they are? What is their purpose? What is my purpose? Worldly wisdom cannot get us what we need most because our human eyes and minds cannot comprehend or pierce the spiritual dimension of our existence. God's eternal plans and purposes for each of us and for our world are hidden from view (Eccl. 8:17).

For those insights to be unlocked, another wisdom must be disclosed: the wisdom that comes from God above. Through the gift of faith in Jesus we trust (and at times by God's grace can see) his kingdom of forgiveness at work beneath the surface of things as he floods the earth with the knowledge of Jesus through the spread of the gospel. The more we are filled with the Lord's love and truth, the more we see serving him at the heart of all we do the more our joy, peace, and hope will be. The more we will realize that we have our own important roles to play in his grand plan of bringing salvation to the world, and along the way we get to use our wisdom and understanding to mine the secrets of his wonder-filled creation.

For your self-reflection:

- 1.) What branch of learning do you find most amazing and incredible and want to investigate and understand more?
- 2.) How does being wise for salvation through faith in Jesus give us the foundation of real wisdom that no text book or tutor could otherwise teach us?

Prayer: Dear heavenly Father, from you comes my body, mind, soul, and all my abilities. May I use them wisely to serve you and better understand and appreciate the amazing world you have made, but more importantly cultivate my spirit through the wisdom that comes from your Word. Grow my devotion and acknowledgment of you so that in all things—big and small—I may better see my place in your design. Through Jesus Christ, my Savior. Amen.