

January 8, 2017

**“From the Hand of God”****Focal Passage: Ecclesiastes 2:1-26 (NASB)**

Cross References: Proverbs 2:1-6; 10:28; Proverbs 14:13; 15:13-15; 17:22; Ecclesiastes 3:4; Habakkuk 3:17-18; Romans 15:13; 1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; James 1:5; 1 Peter 1:8-9; 1 John 2:15-17

**Lesson Idea:** We need to seek the things that are from the hand of God, because all other activities leave us empty.

**BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN**

Jan 1 Genesis 1-3	Jan 2 Genesis 4-7
Jan 3 Genesis 8-11	Jan 4 Genesis 12-15
Jan 5 Genesis 16-18	Jan 6 Genesis 19-21
Jan 7 Genesis 22-24	Jan 8 Genesis 25-26

**Background:**

In Ecclesiastes 2 we read of Solomon’s continued pursuit to find meaning in life apart from God. In the end he found it all to be vanity and chasing after the wind. We know that true joy and contentment can only come from the hand of the eternal and loving Almighty God.

**Ecclesiastes 2:1-11**

*1 I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. 2 I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.*

*9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. 10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.*

**DISCUSSION:**

- v 1-2. Why is pleasure one of the first things that people seek to try to add meaning to their lives? Why does it not bring satisfaction? How is it futility?
- v 2. Is laughter a bad thing? Why or why not? (see Proverbs 14:13; 15:13-15; 17:22; Ecclesiastes 3:4)
- v 3. What kinds of things do people use today like wine to try to stimulate their bodies? Why does that fall short in life?
- v 4-6. Why do people try to pour themselves into their work or build lovely things to try to find meaning? Is there anything wrong with that? Why or why not?
- v 7-8. Why did he collect people and animals as well as monetary treasures? How do people try to enslave others today and why?
- v 8. Why does amassing silver and gold not bring satisfaction?

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

**Musical instruments of all kinds:** “The final item in the list may well refer to Solomon’s wives and concubines, but the Hebrew word does not occur elsewhere in the Bible.” (Wright) The NIV translates, “Harem” and the RSV “Concubines.” The word might be related to the Hebrew word for breast. According to Wright, a Canaanite word of similar form is used to translate the Egyptian word for “concubine.” However, the traditional Jewish rendering is musical instruments.

- v 9. In what way did he “become great?” How much joy do you think it brought him? What are some of the problems that come with fame?
- v 10. Read 1 John 2:15-17. How does this contrast with Solomon’s pursuits? How do we sometimes get

trapped by feeling like possessions are our “reward” for our labor?

- v 11. How did Solomon feel about all of his activities and labor? Why?

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

**For my heart rejoiced in all my labor:** We might say that the Preacher lived this period as a hedonist, but as an intelligent one. He looked for legitimate pleasures in life, such as the rightful pleasure one takes in the accomplishments of hard work (my reward from all my labor).

**Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done . . .** indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind: Solomon examined his life lived for pleasure – even legitimate pleasures – and saw that it too was meaningless. All was vanity. There was no enduring, eternal sense of meaning to life lived for these earthly pleasures and accomplishments.

### **Ecclesiastes 2:12-26**

*Wisdom Excels Folly*

*12 So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done? 13 And 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. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both. 15 Then I said to myself, “As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?” So I said to myself, “This too is vanity.” 16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die! 17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.*

*The Futility of Labor*

*18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity. 20 Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he*

*labors under the sun? 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.*

*24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? 26 For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God’s sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.*

**DISCUSSION:**

- v 12-13. After considering wisdom, madness and folly, what was Solomon’s conclusion and why?
- v 14-17. Why does the fool “walk in darkness?” How do both the fool and the wise man face the same fate? Why did that idea produce frustration? Do you know people who hate life? Why?
- v 18-19. What was another frustration Solomon had concerning all of his hard work? Who will you leave the fruit of your labor to and how well will they care for it? What have you done to preserve some of your legacy to benefit the Kingdom of God after your death?

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

The idea that Solomon might leave all his work and material wealth to a fool seemed to trouble him. This concern was well founded, because after Solomon’s death, Rehoboam turned out to be a fool in many ways (1 Kings 12:1-33, 1 Kings 14:21-31).

“Alas! Solomon, the wisest of all men, made the worst use of his wisdom, had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and yet left but one son behind him, to possess his estates and his throne, and that one was the silliest of fools!” (Clarke)

- v 20-21. How is it easy to despair about life? Why would Solomon consider it a “great evil” to leave his legacy to someone who had not labored for it?

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

***I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun:*** “The only conclusion is that it is all useless. An abyss of despair results. He ‘allowed [his] heart to despair’ (as the Hebrew verb may be translated). This is one of the

most moving points of the Old Testament, the antithesis of the New Testament's 'not in vain in the Lord' (1 Corinthians 15:58)." (Eaton)

- v 22-23. How have you experience pain and grief in your labors? How have you experienced restlessness at night because of your work? How do you deal with that?
- v 24-25. What did Solomon see as being from "the hand of God?" What did he feel was crucial for anyone to be able to have enjoyment in life?

**NOTE:** from Guzik:

***Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink:*** This thought is prominent in Ecclesiastes, being repeated some five times. It seems that the Preacher advised us how to make the best of a bad situation. If life really is as despairing and meaningless as he has shown it to be, then we should simply accept that true meaning is impossible to find, and simply find contentment in moderate and responsible pleasures.

This thinking is prominent in our day. Few people live for true, eternal meaning in their life; so they live with under the sun rules. They try to work hard, enjoy life, have fun, be nice, don't get caught doing wrong, and try not to hurt anybody.

This thinking may work in making a bad situation better; but it gives no true meaning to life in light of eternity.

- v 26. Where do wisdom, knowledge and joy come from? (see Proverbs 2:1-6; 10:28; Habakkuk 3:17-18; Romans 15:13; 2 Timothy 3:15-16; James 1:5; 1 Peter 1:8-9)
- Who is "the sinner" that he speaks about? What does he say will happen to all that the "sinner" amasses?

**APPLICATION:**

- ✓ Read Hebrews 12:1-2. What are the things in your life that are tangling you up? What activities in your life are really just "vanity and striving after wind?" What can you replace these with this week?