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Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

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-{1}. **Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:26** **Embracing the Wind**

A. Introduction^{-{2}}.

1. "Grasping for the Wind"

- a. In these first two chapters of Ecclesiastes, as we read portions from them this morning in the NKJV we came across this phrase
 - (A) and it occurs another four times before the end of the book
 - (B) the AV renders this as "vexation of spirit"
 - (C) with other renderings being "striving after wind" (ERV, et al), "chasing after wind" (NRSV) or "chasing the wind" (NLT)
- b. in each case it is associated with the conclusion that some aspect of human endeavour is vanity, is emptiness, is meaningless; so that this expression must be conveying the extent of that vanity, emptiness, &c
- c. first of all, there is but a single word in each of both Greek and Hebrew, for "spirit" and "wind"
 - (A) in Greek it is pneuma, for which English gets "pneumatic"
 - (B) in Hebrew it is ruach
 - (C) so which is the uppermost idea must be determined by context
- d. the other word comes from a word having three root meanings: feed (as a flock of sheep), associate with (as holding a friend), and desire
 - (A) so the AV, "vexation of spirit" reflects man's thwarted desires
 - (B) and the others, one way or another, the uselessness of that form of human endeavour
- e. hugs are a necessary part of human expression and need
 - (A) "Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."¹ (Genesis 2:18) – and as an aside, that word 'helper' does not mean servant for it is applied to God as our helper (eg., Psalm 54:4)!
 - (B) between parent and child, husband and wife, friends & siblings
 - (C) combining the ideas of desire and the hold of friendship
 - (D) how unsatisfactory, then is it to hug air, emptiness, the wind
- f. that is what this phrase is expressing, however it is translated – how full of emptiness is embracing the wind

2. Solomon's Argument in this Book

- a. it is not especially difficult, but quite simple and straightforward

- (A) on the one hand there is presented the vanity of the humanistic world-view or perspective
- (B) on the other hand is presented, within the limits of the OT revelation, the answer to that vanity of the theistic world-view
- (C) Solomon lays out man's ideas upon a certain aspect of life
- (D) until he comes to the point where it is evident that those ideas are bankrupt: that the ideas have arrived in some fashion to show that life based upon them is vanity, emptiness & frustration
- (E) then, bringing in the divine world-view he shows that in some fashion when God is included in life, it is no longer empty

b. this argument

- (A) should convince the unbeliever who has left God out of his life thus far that he needs to turn to God
- (B) should assure the believer with God in his life his every activity is filled with meaning and purpose
- (C) and motivate the child of God to introduce friends to Jesus Christ

B. Solomon's Further Explorations

1. Wisdom & Knowledge

1:12-16

- a. "And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with." (1:13)
 - (A) the chipmunk scurries constantly about, selecting that next maple key to stuff in the pouch of his cheeks to carry off to his store
 - (B) the cardinal rises early in the morning, whistling a shrill song, to the top of a tree to enjoy the rising sun on his scarlet feathers
 - (C) but man has been created differently – in the image of God, as a moral and intellectual being – and has been given a task, a grievous task to puzzle out the meaning of life, and blinded by sin so as to be unable to accomplish this
 - (D) but, "What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted." (1:15)
 - (1) the information we get from our senses and reason has been distorted by sin, and presents us with a false picture
 - (2) and we do not have access to all the information, so our reasoning is based on deficient facts
 - (3) so, "... all is vanity and embracing the wind." (1:14)
- b. "I said to myself, "Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge."" (1:16)
 - (A) Solomon, more than any other, had all the advantages in making this search for life's purposes and

meaning

- (1) God-given wisdom – which in the context of his request for wisdom, should be understood as prudence & discernment
 - (2) a kingdom in time of peace giving him leisure
 - (3) incomparable wealth
- (B) he draws upon his personal experience to examine some of the things that the natural man thinks to be the purpose of life
- (1) he explores the matter of wisdom and knowledge itself
 - (2) and concludes that they but lead to "... much grief, and ... increasing pain." (v 18)

2. Man's Various Diversions for Enjoyment

a. Entertainment and the Table

2:1-3

- (A) the attitude that, "let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." (Isaiah 22:13)
- (B) "I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself." And behold, it too was futility. I said of laughter, "It is madness," and of pleasure, "What does it accomplish?" I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, ..." (2:1-3a)
- (C) he focuses on the pleasures most people consider worthwhile
 - (1) humour – but the jokes grow stale
 - (2) wine – Solomon well knew the truth of the proverbs he had written, such as "Do not look on the wine when it is red, When it sparkles in the cup, When it goes down smoothly;" (Proverbs 23:31)
- (D) but he did so examining the result with wisdom; and it was futility – vanity, emptiness

b. Works and Wealth

2:4-10

- (A) "I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself;" (2:4) – gardens, parks ("Paradises"), ponds
- (B) "I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves..." (2:7) – herds & flocks, silver & gold, court singers, wives
- (C) "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 labour and this was my reward for all my labour." (2:10)



(D) this is reminiscent of an ad of some years ago, showing a table and arm chair, and this caption, "Treat yourself, we know your (sic) deserve it. Featuring our Hug lounge chair in the latest Elysian collection ..." ^{3}.

(1) really ! ? !

(2) the meaning of life is a lounge chair? – "... for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions." (Luke 12:15)

c. The conclusion?

2:11

(A) what is the result of all the diversions which a man takes hold of in order to make life meaningful?

(B) he has listed just a few of the things with which man whiles away his time seeking enjoyment – today we could add sports

(C) he comes again to the same conclusion about man's efforts

(D) "Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labour which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun." (2:11)

C. The Ultimate Vanity, Death

1. Wisdom in Contrast to Folly

2:12-17

a. "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?" (2:12)

b. having explored wisdom on its own, he now explores the opposite – would the end result (for himself) be any different if he had been foolish (lacking in prudence) or mad (lacking in understanding)?

(A) to be wise is better

(1) it excels folly (2:13)

(2) it provides enlightenment (2:14)

(B) but both suffer the same fate – death (2:15)

(C) and the wise man is no more remembered than a fool, for in the days to come they will both be forgotten (2:16) – death is the great leveller in this as in other ways

c. the conclusion: "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." (2:17)

2. The Uncertainty of Inheritance

2:18-23

- a. "Thus I hated all the fruit of my labour for which I had laboured under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labour for which I have laboured by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity." (2:18-19)
- b. There is a satisfaction in labour while we are doing it
 - (A) man was made for labour and that preceded sin's entry
 - (B) Adam was put into the garden to 'dress' it – prune, and so on
 - (C) the commandment to Israel was "Six days shalt thou labour..."
 - (D) and Christians are instructed, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men," (Colossians 3:23) – for them work is fulfilling
- c. but when God is left out of the equation, the result in the final analysis is not fulfilling – because the ultimate enjoyment of that work is left indiscriminately to others: "When there is a man who has laboured with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not laboured with them. This too is vanity and a great evil." (2:21)
- d. as with wisdom, so with labour: "his task is painful and grievous" (2:23)

D. Conclusion: Life With Meaning

2:24-26

1. Bring God into the Picture

- a. "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labour is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?" (2:24-25)
 - (A) at first glance that looks as though it is advocating a life given over only to pleasure; but that is not the case
 - (B) the difference here is the admission of God into your life
 - (C) it is the same lesson the Paul told Timothy to preach: "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy." (1 Timothy 6:17)
- b. It is God in ones' life that makes the difference between vanity & reality; between emptiness & fulfilment
 - (A) In NT terms it is because the believer has a relationship with the risen Lord & Saviour, Jesus Christ
 - (1) Paul could look back on many experiences
 - (2) but all these were meaningless if they were not for Christ
 - (3) "If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." (1 Corinthians 15:32)
 - (4) that is, without Christ in one's life, life is vanity, futility

- c. there is a reason, therefore, to pursue this course, given in verse 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."
- (A) God's purpose is to bless those who are His own
 - (B) there is no real enjoyment apart from God
 - (C) to the godless who cannot expect such blessing, this is a cause of frustration – for them it means embracing the wind
 - (D) this may not be the case in this life – the Psalms bear witness to that fact – but it is always ultimately true

2. George Frideric Handel –{4}.

- a. in his 20's an established reputation as a music composer & organist
- b. through 30's and 40's wrote music in London
 - (A) primarily opera for the upper class
 - (B) took couple of months to prepare an opera
 - (C) during this time he ran into debt
 - (D) the opera would play for 2, 3 days, a week, a week and a half
 - (E) pay off his debts and start all over again
- c. at 52 had a stroke, lost use of his right side
 - (A) forced by ill health to take a break & recuperate
 - (B) he was told how "his oratorio Esther" had been an inspiration
 - (C) someone had stolen his music to create that oratorio
- d. on returning to London thought about this
 - (A) people need more than entertainment
 - (B) Charles Jenner came to him for music for words he had written
 - (C) it was the OT passages foretelling of Christ
 - (D) writing for 24 straight days he produced music for "Messiah"
 - (E) thereafter concentrated on his gift for inspirational music
 - (F) **It is a shame when we wait until we have a stroke or a heart attack or a divorce before we sit back and think about where our lives are headed. Like Handel, you and I need to pause every so often in order to get God's perspective. It makes all the difference.**

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AV	Authorized (King James) Version of 1769
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation (usually the 1995 edition)
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 National Council of Churches of Christ

Some of the commentaries and resources used in the preparation of this message are identified as follow:

- BM – Biblical Museum, Editor James Comper Gray, ca 1870
- EBC – The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, © 1986 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 49530, MI:
Ecclesiastes: J. Stafford Wright
- K&D -- Keil & Delitzsch, Volume 6: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
- Kerux – The sermon & illustration data base compiled by Rev. David Holwick at the web-site, www.holwick.com.

2. I am indebted to Rev’d David Holwick’s message, Kerux sermon # 841, for many of the thoughts found in this message.
3. From <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/496170083930780790/>
4. Article on Handel adapted from Kerux illustration #2658