

ECCLESIASTES 2

MORE VANITY

Solomon had discovered the evanescence of the fame which a person may attain from the accumulation of a string of letters behind his or her name; and he had also experienced the diminishing of that pleasure which is derived from the acquisition of such knowledge, by the reflection that man exists only in the present state. Hence he decided that in much wisdom, there is much dissatisfaction; and that the one who increases knowledge also increases sorrow.

But now the Preacher enters upon another experiment! He leaves the somber study in order to join in the frolic of the world. He leaves the library, the laboratory, and the council-chamber; and he goes into the park, the theater, and his summer-cottage. He exchanges the company of the philosophers and grave senators for that of the wits and gallants and beauties of his court, to see if he could find true satisfaction among them. He pushes the experiment, not being satisfied with a half-way attempt; and to the pleasures of imagination, he adds those of luxury. He tries the exhilaration of the wine glass, and has his table loaded with the best food from all regions of the globe; and all the while, he is still acquainting his heart with wisdom – that is, he is philosophically comparing these sensual gratifications with the more refined pleasures of a cultivated intellect. Behold Solomon now – in the midst of the rowdy and reckless! He has filled his court with buffoons and clowns and witty jesters. His palaces and pleasure-grounds resound with boisterous mirth and revelry. But it was all in vain! When the laughter was loudest, and the merriment was carried to its highest pitch; then this sickening sensation would return upon him: eternal oblivion awaited him in the grave!

The Preacher next decided to try something more dignified than jests and laughter – namely, splendor and luxury. He built palaces, he laid out gardens and parks and vineyards, he dug artificial lakes and built superb reservoirs, he increased his flocks and herds, he amassed imperial treasures of silver and gold, and he employed bands of musicians and choirs of singers. None of our modern epicureans can ever hope to equal that princely lifestyle which Solomon adopted! But it was doubtless in his palace at Jerusalem that his display of art, wealth, and luxury was the most breathtaking. He had whatever his eyes desired; he did not restrain his heart from any joy which his imagination could conceive.

But what a mockery there is in all the pomp and glory of this world, if there is another and better world for which we can be prepared only by the mortification of pride and fleshly lusts! And even if the only purpose for man's exist-

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ Solomon shows that there is no true happiness in worldly pleasures – verses 1-11
- ❖ He reiterates that wisdom is insufficient to make a person happy – verses 12-16
- ❖ He concludes that worldly wealth and business is vanity and vexation of spirit to those who set their hearts upon them – verses 17-26

ence was simply to go to the grave and cease to exist, would not these carnal pleasures still be a mockery? What would they amount to? A martyr for Jesus may go to the stake with smiles, because he knows that he shall live forever in the presence of that Savior to whom he is faithful to the end. But how can someone who knows nothing of such assurance take any pleasure in his earthly feasts and frivolities, without seeing the ghastly skeleton seated at the feast – unless he bids farewell to all serious reflections when he plunges into those scenes of splendid luxury and indulgence? There will come a day when he must leave those scenes; and according to his erroneous worldview, there is nothing better beyond. Such a person may say that since oblivion so soon awaits us, it is better to be happy while we may, and so we should at least sing and dance on our way to our doom. But will the wise man say so? Will the person who searches into the great purpose of human existence say so? Is this a satisfactory answer to the question, “What is the purpose and meaning of life?” To say that with such an intellectual and moral nature as man possesses, he was created merely for the enjoyment of carnal pleasures – to say such a thing is to impeach the wisdom of the great Creator. It is essentially asserting a failure in respect to the chiefest of His works!

Solomon grew weary of all his works, because he did not meet with that satisfaction in them which he expected. After he had built his fine houses, gardens, and waterworks, he began to look upon them with contempt – just as children are eager for a toy and are fond of it at first, but then tire of it and must have another.



He was disgusted with the thought that all the profit of his labor must be left to others. He quarreled with all the great works which he had made, because they would not be of any lasting advantage to himself.

From this, let us learn this point that is worthy of our notice. To provide an honest living for our families is a Christian duty. But poor indeed will our children be if they only enjoy our houses and lands, and do not have a relationship with the God of their father and mother! Christian parents must not neglect to prayerfully point their sons and daughters to the heavenly inheritance above! Surely, by his negative portrayal of what human pleasures and learning are *not*, the wise Preacher intended to proclaim most loudly what Christ and His graces truly *are*. For if everything short of Jesus is vanity, and if He Himself is the only substantial good; then what happier method could the wise man have adopted in thus appealing to the various experiences of mankind, in order to show that it is Jesus alone Who can cause those who love Him to inherit lasting riches, and to fill their heavenly treasures?

Lord, help us to not be consumed with chasing after the pleasures of this world! Help us to remember that “Godliness with contentment is great gain!” Amen.