

“The Wise and the Foolish”  
Ecclesiastes 2:12-23  
(Preached at Trinity, May 7, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citation will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Solomon has been describing what the life of fallen humanity looks like. What is a life without God? First, Solomon describes our labors without God – it is all vanity, futility. Then, Solomon looks at wisdom without God – it too is futility. Then, in **Chapter 2** he turns to pleasure – once again, without God it is futility.
2. Now, beginning with **Verse 12**, he again turns to wisdom and his conclusion is even worse. Without God, there is really no difference between the foolish and the wise.
  - A. On one hand, wisdom far excels folly. The difference between the two is like the difference between darkness and light.  
**Ecclesiastes 2:13 NAU** - "And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness."
  - B. The Bible tells us much about fools.  
**Proverbs 14:1 NAU** - "The wise woman builds her house, But the foolish tears it down with her own hands."  
**Proverbs 21:20 NAU** - "There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise, But a foolish man swallows it up."  
**Proverbs 10:8 NAU** - "The wise of heart will receive commands, But a babbling fool will be ruined."
  - C. On the other hand, both share the same end in life. All die and are forgotten.  
**Ecclesiastes 2:16 NAU** - "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!"
- I. Both the wise and the foolish will die
  - A. No amount of earthly wisdom or earthly wealth can satisfy death's insatiable appetite.
    1. The penalty of Adam's sin has fallen upon all
    2. Genesis 5 is a testimony of death.  
Over and over it records the end of life.  
**Genesis 5:5 NAU** - "So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died."  
“and he died” is repeated eight times.
    3. Joshua described the end of his life as sharing in the common lot of all— as going the way of all the earth.  
**Joshua 23:14 NAU** - "Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth"

4. David described his own life the same way.  
**1 Kings 2:1-2 NAU** - "As David's time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, <sup>2</sup> "I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man."
5. Solomon is saying that all men die, regardless of who they are. They live their brief life and then they are forgotten.
6. This led to the ultimate conclusion. If we live and die and then we are forgotten, what's the point of life. It led Solomon to hate life.  
**Ecclesiastes 2:17 NAU** - "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."

B. All of us should be prepared for the hour of death. It's God's design. And for God's people it's God's delight.

**Psalms 116:15 NAU** - "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His godly ones."

1. David prayed:

**Psalms 39:4 NAU** - "LORD, make me to know my end And what is the extent of my days; Let me know how transient I am."

2. Although both the wise and the foolish die it is the fool that does not consider the hour of death.

C. Although both the wise and the foolish share the same end, the wise man is much better off.

**Ecclesiastes 2:14 NAU** - "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."

1. This is a Hebrew saying. His eyes are open and watchful. The wise man is able to see.

2. The fool trudges blindly ahead without discretion.

II. While both share the same end, the wise prosper much more in this life.

A. Solomon's life was a testimony to vanity.

1. He discovered his labors were futile. Without God all is meaningless.

2. Pleasure would last for a moment but provided no lasting value.

This is the nature of all sin. It makes many promises convincing us it is the wise choice, but then deceives us and leaves us empty.

3. This is not to diminish the greater value of wisdom over folly.

Even in a world that denies God, it is better to be wise than to be a fool.

It was by wise management that Solomon's wealth increased so greatly.

a. We also saw this with Jacob.

Laban prospered by the shrewd management of Jacob.

**Genesis 30:29-30 NAU** - "But he said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle have fared with me. <sup>30</sup> "For you had little before I came and it has increased to a multitude, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned."

- b. And of course, Joseph's wise management of Egypt's goods delivered them from the famine.  
**Genesis 41:39-40 NAU** - "Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you are. <sup>40</sup> "You shall be over my house, and according to your command all my people shall do homage; only in the throne I will be greater than you."

- B. This is a general axiom. The wise generally prosper much more than the foolish.
1. They labor harder and are wise in the management of their resources.
  2. They learn the value of being frugal and thrifty. I still remember being impressed that Warren Buffet drove a twenty-year-old Volvo.
  3. The foolish man often falls into poverty.  
**Proverbs 6:6-11 NAU** - "Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, <sup>7</sup> Which, having no chief, Officer or ruler, <sup>8</sup> Prepares her food in the summer *And* gathers her provision in the harvest. <sup>9</sup> How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? <sup>10</sup> "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest "-- <sup>11</sup> Your poverty will come in like a vagabond And your need like an armed man."
  4. Many today decry the lopsided distribution of wealth. They want to redistribute the wealth so all will be equal. That's the lie of Marxism and socialism. God does not suggest robbing the rich to give to the poor.
    - a. The Bible wants us to examine carefully the great difference between those who are diligent and those who are slothful – the wise and the foolish.
    - b. We can't presume that all who are poor are suffering due to their own neglect, or sinful behavior.  
 There are many providential situations that can have an impact upon one's economic situation. There have been famines and natural disasters. There can be unexpected illness or the loss of a job. Some are born into conditions of poverty that are difficult to escape.
    - c. But sin, and a refusal to give oneself to labor has its consequences. Paul made a bold statement.  
**2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 NAU** - "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread."

5. Solomon wrote much about the consequences of foolishness and sloth.  
**Proverbs 24:30-34 NAU** - "I passed by the field of the sluggard And by the vineyard of the man lacking sense, <sup>31</sup> And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles; Its surface was covered with nettles, And its stone wall was broken down. <sup>32</sup> When I saw, I reflected upon it; I looked, *and* received instruction. <sup>33</sup> "A little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to rest," <sup>34</sup> Then your poverty will come as a robber And your want like an armed man."  
**Proverbs 13:4 NAU** - "The soul of the sluggard craves and *gets* nothing, But the soul of the diligent is made fat."  
**Proverbs 3:7-10 NAU** - "Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. <sup>8</sup> It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones. <sup>9</sup> Honor the LORD from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; <sup>10</sup> So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine."

6. It's been said that if you took the earth's wealth and divided it equally, within a generation it would return to those who previous held it.

- C. Solomon laments the thought of spending a lifetime laboring only to leave it in the hands of a fool.

**Ecclesiastes 2:18-19 NAU** - "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. <sup>19</sup> 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."

1. Everything you've worked for, everything you've built, all will be left into the hands of another.
2. The old adage, "you can't take it with you" is an absolute.
3. You've worked hard for what you have. Someone else will have it who didn't work for it. They don't deserve it.
4. Solomon has his focus on all the wealth he has amassed. What happens when he dies? The interesting point here is that Solomon built an amazing kingdom that people came from far and wide just to witness. Upon his death his son, Rehoboam quickly destroyed it.

- D. It turns our thoughts to the subject of inheritance.

1. A couple labors their entire life. They pay for a home and acquire things of value. It is a blessing to be able to pass these things along to their children when they die.
2. The Bible describes inheritance as a good thing. It is a blessing to be able to pass an inheritance along to the next generation. In fact, the Bible implies that it is an evil thing to squander one's wealth without consideration of the next generation. The bumper sticker that reads, "I'm spending my children's inheritance" may sound cute, but it is actually a sign of fleshly self-indulgence.

**Proverbs 13:22 NAU** - "A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children"

3. Sometimes a family acquires a great deal of wealth that remains with the family and it is passed on from generation to generation. This is why inheritance tax is so evil. It robs families of their wealth and children of their inheritance.
4. It only takes one generation or one foolish individual to squander it all. The one who receives wealth without being taught the value of labor and of cautious spending often squander it foolishly.

III. We need to train our children well – of being good stewards.

- A. Eventually, they will be left to manage the family's goods.
  1. They need to be taught the importance of hard work, of saving, of being willing to delay expenditures, of planning for the future.
  2. An inheritance in the hands of wise children will be preserved unto the next generation. An inheritance in the hands of foolish children will be quickly consumed.  
**Luke 15:11-14 NAU** - "A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. <sup>13</sup> "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. <sup>14</sup> "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished."
- B. An inheritance isn't a spending spree but a stewardship.
  1. We need to train our children to be wise.  
**Proverbs 2:1-5 NAU** - "My son, if you will receive my words And treasure my commandments within you, <sup>2</sup> Make your ear attentive to wisdom, Incline your heart to understanding; <sup>3</sup> For if you cry for discernment, Lift your voice for understanding; <sup>4</sup> If you seek her as silver And search for her as for hidden treasures; <sup>5</sup> Then you will discern the fear of the LORD And discover the knowledge of God."
  2. The implication is that we are giving our children wise words to receive.  
**Proverbs 3:1-2 NAU** - "My son, do not forget my teaching, But let your heart keep my commandments; <sup>2</sup> For length of days and years of life And peace they will add to you."
  3. Sadly, Solomon strayed from David's instruction. Rehoboam did not follow Solomon's teaching. We are all in need of God's grace as we teach and pray for our children and grandchildren.

Conclusion:

The fear of the LORD remains the beginning of wisdom. Those who follow Him find true joy and genuine life.

**Proverbs 3:7-10 NAU** - "Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. <sup>8</sup> It will be healing to your body And refreshment to your bones. <sup>9</sup> Honor the LORD from your wealth And from the first of all your produce; <sup>10</sup> So your barns will be filled with plenty And your vats will overflow with new wine."