

The Vanity of the Heart & The Pursuit of Joy | Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:17

I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to see and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after the wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.

I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity. I said of laughter, "It is made," and of pleasure, "What use is it?" I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine – my heart still guiding me with wisdom – and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man. So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. Then I said in my heart, "What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?" And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

Introduction

A. "The Great American Search for Happiness is a characteristically American struggle, a 'wagons of the west' of the soul. The belief that if you put in enough emotional elbow grease, if you slog out the hours in yoga classes and mindfulness seminars, parachute jumps and self-help books and megachurches and therapy sessions, then eternal happiness will be yours. When a new American friend persuades me to try out a yoga class, you can almost smell the tension and misery in the room." (Ruth Whippman)

The Vanity of the Heart

1. The pursuit of wisdom and knowledge

- a. "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. And God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days. And if you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." (1 Kings 3:9-14)
- b. "For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs 2:6)

2. The pursuit of pleasure

3. The pursuit of possession

4. The pursuit of sexual desire

- a. "He had 700 wives, who were princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father." "(1 Kings 11:3-4)
- b. "Most Americans today experience more pleasure than most people in the history of the world. Yet in spite of our prosperity, or maybe because of it, we still suffer from poverty of soul. The taste of pleasure has grown our appetite for this world beyond satisfaction." (Philip Ryken)

The Result of Vanity of the Heart

1. Wisdom is necessary, but limited

2. Wisdom does not protect against death

The Pursuit of Joy

1. Jesus is the Savior for the dissatisfied sinner
2. Enjoy the gifts of God for you – they point us to His goodness!

Benediction | Psalm 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.