

Ecclesiastes

Part Two: *chasing the wind!*

April 14, 2024

Last Sunday, we covered the book's first section where Solomon states and supports his thesis: "Everything is meaningless!" I told you last week the word translated *meaningless* is the Hebrew word *hevel*. *Hevel* means vapor or smoke, but Solomon uses *hevel* in Ecclesiastes to describe how life is temporary, puzzling, and without real value. Today, we're going to begin the second section of Ecclesiastes, where Solomon uses his life to prove that everything is meaningless.

In 1:12-2:12, Solomon gives proof from experience that everything is meaningless.

1st – Solomon failed to find meaning through knowledge and wisdom.

In his quest to find meaning in life, Solomon used wisdom to evaluate all the activities of life.

"I, the Teacher, was king of Israel, and I lived in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done under heaven. I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race. I observed everything going on under the sun, and really, it is all meaningless—like chasing the wind. What is wrong cannot be made right. What is missing cannot be recovered. I said to myself, "Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them." So I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness and folly. But I learned firsthand that pursuing all this is like chasing the wind. The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow." (Ecclesiastes 1:12–18, NLT)

Solomon described life on Earth as a "tragic existence" ("grievous task," NKJV; "heavy burden," NIV) after he observed that humans cannot remedy all the wrongs or counteract all the deficiencies in our sin-cursed world. Knowledge and wisdom cannot explain and solve everything that happened on Earth.

2nd - Solomon failed to find meaning through pleasure.

"I said to myself, "Come on, let's try pleasure. Let's look for the 'good things' in life." But I found that this, too, was meaningless. So I said, "Laughter is silly. What good does it do to seek pleasure?" After much thought, I decided to cheer myself with wine. And while still seeking wisdom, I clutched at foolishness. In this way, I tried to experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world." (Ecclesiastes 2:1–3, NLT)

Imagine Solomon in his lavish banquet hall (1 Kings 10:21), eating choice food (1 Kings 4:22–23), drinking the very best wine, and watching the most gifted entertainers (2:8b). But Solomon found pleasure to be *hevel* – temporary, puzzling, and without real value.

3rd - Solomon failed to find meaning through building, collecting, and working.

"I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves. I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household. I also owned large herds and flocks, more than any of the kings who had lived in Jerusalem before me. I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire! So I became greater than all who had lived in Jerusalem before me, and my wisdom never failed me. Anything I wanted, I would take. I denied myself no pleasure. I even found great pleasure in hard work, a reward for all my labors. But as I looked at everything I had worked so hard to accomplish, it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind. There was nothing really worthwhile anywhere." (Ecclesiastes 2:4–11, NLT)

- **Solomon stated that wisdom has little value.**

“So I decided to compare wisdom with foolishness and madness (for who can do this better than I, the king?). I thought, “Wisdom is better than foolishness, just as light is better than darkness. For the wise can see where they are going, but fools walk in the dark.” Yet I saw that the wise and the foolish share the same fate. Both will die. So I said to myself, “Since I will end up the same as the fool, what’s the value of all my wisdom? This is all so meaningless!” For the wise and the foolish both die. The wise will not be remembered any longer than the fool. In the days to come, both will be forgotten. So I came to hate life because everything done here under the sun is so troubling. Everything is meaningless—like chasing the wind.” (Eccl 2:12–17, NLT)

Solomon said living wisely has some benefits. A wise man can better enjoy life and avoid danger. However, both wise and foolish men die and are forgotten.

- **Solomon stated that hard work has little value.**

“I came to hate all my hard work here on earth, for I must leave to others everything I have earned. And who can tell whether my successors will be wise or foolish? Yet they will control everything I have gained by my skill and hard work under the sun. How meaningless! So I gave up in despair, questioning the value of all my hard work in this world. Some people work wisely with knowledge and skill, then must leave the fruit of their efforts to someone who hasn’t worked for it. This, too, is meaningless, a great tragedy. So what do people get in this life for all their hard work and anxiety? Their days of labor are filled with pain and grief; even at night their minds cannot rest. It is all meaningless.” (Ecclesiastes 2:18–23, NLT)

Solomon said hard work is meaningless because you die and leave everything you have worked for to foolish and lazy people.

But, after stating that wisdom and work have little value, Solomon gave a conclusion - the first of his six conclusions in Ecclesiastes (2:24-26; 3:12-15, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:9-10).

- **Solomon concluded that we should enjoy the life God has given us.**

“So I decided there is nothing better than to enjoy food and drink and to find satisfaction in work. Then I realized that these pleasures are from the hand of God. For who can eat or enjoy anything apart from Him? God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who please Him. But if a sinner becomes wealthy, God takes the wealth away and gives it to those who please Him. This, too, is meaningless—like chasing the wind.” (Eccl 2:24–26)

After finding everything in his life meaningless, Solomon concludes by telling us to enjoy life. To do that, we must see that pleasures come from God, and He gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to those who seek to please Him. Although life on earth is temporary, puzzling, and of no real value, we should trust God, enjoy His gifts, and seek to please Him. That is the way to live a meaningful life!