

THE DILEMMA DELIBERATED (1:12-12:8)\ IT'S A THIN LINE BETWEEN LIFE AND HATE ECCLESIASTES 2:12-26

In verse 17 Solomon said that he “hated life.” The reason for this statement was because he realized you can spend your whole life acting in wisdom and in the end, the wise man dies just like the fool. It is interesting to note that the word “life” in this verse is plural in the Hebrew and can be translated “lives.” The plural indicates that he not only hated life in general but also everything about life. He hated the lives of the wise/fool, rich/poor, young/old, laborer/slothful, etc.

SOLOMON HATED LIFE (2:12-17)

WISDOM IS BETTER THAN FOOLISHNESS (2:12-13)

And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done. Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. After his initial examination in 1:12-2:11, Solomon wanted to take a second look at three things—wisdom, madness (insane pleasures) and folly (foolish entertainment). He was more than qualified to do this search, more than anyone before him and anyone who would come “after the king.” At this point he concluded that it was better to be wise than to be stupid, because wisdom surpasses folly like light surpasses darkness.

THE WISE MAN AND THE FOOL BOTH DIE (2:14-16)

“The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all” (14). The wise man has the light shed on life’s situations and can see them clearly, while the fool is in darkness and stumbles because he cannot see things. After proclaiming the superiority of the wise man over the fool, Solomon plunges back into the depths of despair as he acknowledges the end of both men:

- They both die.
“Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity” (15). The wise man spends his life making wise choices that makes him better off than the fool. But he dies just like the fool and what good were those wise choices? Solomon came to the conclusion that this was “vanity” (empty).
- They both are forgotten.
“For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool” (16). Even though there are some individuals who etch a permanent record in

history to be remembered for all times, the fact is that most human beings will not be remembered for any length of time after they die.

SOLOMON HATED LIFE (17)

“Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” Solomon hated (became disgusted with) life because trying to be wise was grievous (miserable and distressing), vanity (meaningless and empty) and vexation of spirit (chasing after the wind). The bottom line—it doesn’t make any difference how a person lives he still dies and his wisdom will not be remembered.

SOLOMON HATED ALL OF HIS POSSESSIONS (2:18-19)

“Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity.” In these verses, Solomon directs his hatred for life to the hatred of his possessions. He hated all the things that he had worked for during his lifetime. He gives us two reasons why he hated his possessions:

- He hated them because he was going to have to leave it behind (18).
- He hated them because after exercising much wisdom to obtain them there was the possibility they would be left in the hands of a fool (19).

SOLOMON HATED THE RESULTS OF HARD WORK (2:20-23)

HE HATED HIS LABOR BECAUSE HE WAS GOING TO LEAVE HIS POSSESSIONS TO A PERSON WHO DID NOT LABOR FOR IT (20-21)

Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil. He hated them because the things he had labored so hard to get were going to be left to a person who did not labor one minute for them. The word “labour” (Hebrew *amal*) refers to the daily grind of toilsome labor.

HE HATED HIS LABOR BECAUSE IT WAS FILLED WITH PAIN, GREIF AND SLEEPLESS NIGHTS (22-23)

“For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.” As Solomon thought about his many years of hard work,

which would be left to another, he exclaimed that it was “vanity” (empty, evil and unfair). In his moment of despair, he leaves us with three observations about hard work:

- It is filled with days of pain (Hebrew *makobim*) mental distress.
- It is filled with grief (Hebrew *wakaas*) agitation
- It is filled with many sleepless nights, consumed with continuous thought concerning labor.

THE REDEEMING VALUE IN HIS LABOR (24-26)

Enjoyment of Labor Is God’s Gift to Man

“*There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God*” (24). Out of the depths of despair, Qoheleth gives a glimmer of hope. He informs us that God’s gift to man is to be able to enjoy the fruit of his labor. This perspective helps him find satisfaction in his work opposed to leaving it to someone else who might waste it or not appreciate it.

True Enjoyment of Labor Is only Found in God

“*For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?*” (25). The proper translation of this verse is found in the NASB “*For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him [God]?*” Enjoyment of one’s work is only possible with the blessings of God.

God Gives Insight on How Enjoy Labor

“*For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy*” (26a). God not only gives labor, He also gives the wisdom and knowledge on how to enjoy it.

God Gives the Fruit of the Sinners Labor to the Righteous

“*but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit*” (26b). For the first time Solomon takes us above the sun to see God at work. God gives man wisdom and knowledge to enjoy His blessings. After this statement, he drops us back under the sun as he describes the God’s judgement upon the sinner—he labors hard only to give it to the person who is good (righteousness). For the sinner, this is empty and chasing after the wind.

WISDOM FOR EVERY GENERATION

Jesus gave the Parable of the Wise Man Who Built His House upon the Rock (Matt. 7:24-27). Is there a difference between the wise man Jesus described in the parable and the wise man Solomon talked about.?

Solomon said that both the wise man and the fool have the same end—they both die. Can wisdom exercised in this life have an impact on eternity?

Solomon described the toil and vanity of labor. Only in Christ can we find rest and enjoyment in our labor. Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt. 11:28-30). Even though these verses are speaking of rest from laboring to be right with God, they can also refer to our rest from physical labor. How can we find rest in labor?

What are some ways we can see meaning and fulfillment in labor?