

## A BIBLE STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

Theme: **Solomon and Jesus, Both Sons of David, say:  
“Fear God and keep his commandments,  
For this is the whole duty of man!”**

Trinity Lutheran Church  
Norman, Oklahoma  
Pastor David Nehrenz  
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### A. TEXT

**(Chapter 2)** (1) I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself." But behold, this also was vanity. (2) I said of laughter, "It is mad," and of pleasure, "What use is it?" (3) 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**.

(4) I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. (5) I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. (6) I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. (7) 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. (8) 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 children of man**.

(9) So I became great and surpassed **all who were before me** in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. (10) 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.

(11) 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.

(12) 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. (13) Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. (14) **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**.

(15) 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. (16) 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!**

(17) So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind. (18) I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to **the man who will come after me**, (19) and who knows whether he will be **wise or a fool?** Yet **he will be master of all** for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

(20) So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, (21) because sometimes **a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it**. This also is vanity and a great evil.

(22) What has **a man** from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? (23) For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night **his heart** does not rest. This also is vanity.

**(24) There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, (25) for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? (26) For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy,**

but to **the sinner** he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give **to one who pleases God**. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

## B. STUDY NOTES

1. (vv. 1-11) **Pleasures are meaningless**
  - a. Laughter and wine and folly (**Prov 14:13; Jdg 9:13**)
  - b. Building and landscaping projects (**2 Sam 2:13; 4:12; 1 Ki ch. 4-11; 6:38; 2 Ch 2:1; 8:1-6**)
  - c. Slaves and flocks (**1 Ki 5:13; 9:22; 2 Chr 8:7,8**)
  - d. Silver, gold, treasure, singers (**1 Ki 9:28; 2 Sam 19:35; Lk 12:15-21; 1 Tim 6:17**)
  - e. The splendor of his wives (v. 8) – a harem (**1 Ki 3:1; 11:1-13**) 700 wives; 300 concubines
  - f. He became greater than all kings (**1 Chr 29:25**)
  
2. (vv. 12-16) **Wisdom and Folly are meaningless**
  - a. The folly of finding satisfaction in mere human wisdom.  
No matter whether wise or foolish, we all share the same fate (**Ps 49:10**)
  
  - b. Even great people and leaders are soon forgotten (**1 Cor 1:20**)
  
3. (vv. 17-23) **Toil is Meaningless**

We leave our possessions to the one who comes after us (**Job 8:9; Ps 39:6; Lk 12:16-21**)
  
4. (vv. 23-26) **the simple gifts of life give it meaning - to the man who pleases God**
  - a. THE HEART OF THE MATTER (**3:12,13,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7; 12:13**)
  - b. From the hand of God alone comes all good (**Ps 145:15,16; Ac 17:28; Eph 5:20**)
  - c. The exception to the rule (**8:14; Ps 73:1-12**)
  - d. Other Biblical allusions: (**Job 2:10; 9:4; 27:17; Ps 112; 127:2; Prov 13:22; Mt 6:19-27; 11:28; 25:14-30; 1 Cor 15:32**)
  - e. True wisdom comes from God alone in Jesus Christ (**Ps 111:10; Prov 2:6; 1 Cor 1:24,30**)
  - f. **Luther's excellent exhortation based on Solomon's words:**

“In sum, we should not find enjoyment in happiness, goods, our own counsels, or any other thing; only as God has given them should we use them. One should let God have His way. It is not up to us to prescribe the place, the person, or the manner; if we do, we shall go wrong. This does not mean that happiness is condemned as something evil or vain. What is condemned is human striving and planning, when we ourselves want or try to create happiness without respect to the will of God. But as both come from God, so let us use them.

As it is a sin to invite anxiety and sorrow by our own counsels and also a sin to refuse to suffer them when they are imposed on us by God, so it is also to be condemned if we run away from happiness and do not accept it when it is given by God. This is what those sanctimonious killjoys do when they “disfigure their faces” (Matt. 6:16). They seek out places, times, and persons that are gloomy, and they prescribe strict regulations, which is hypocritical and vain. They want us to weep with those who weep, but they themselves refuse to rejoice with those who rejoice (cf. Rom. 12:15). Sorrow, happiness, and all such things, whether external or internal, must not be measured on the basis of places, times, etc.; but as they come from God in His complete freedom, so one should use them in complete freedom.<sup>1</sup>”

**g. St. Augustine:** “Thou hast made us for Thyself O Lord, and our souls are restless, until they rest in Thee.”

## C. LIFE APPLICATION

1. Why do earthly pleasures alone never truly satisfy us?
2. How is it that heavenly treasures will always truly satisfy us?

<sup>1</sup> Luther, M. (1999). *Luther's works, vol. 15: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Last Words of David, 2 Samuel 23:1-7*. (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald, & H. T. Lehmann, Eds.) (Vol. 15, p. 30). Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House.