

Teach Us, Qohelet (Part 2)

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18

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When we read Ecclesiastes, we are gathering at the feet of *Qohelet*, the teacher and gatherer. He is like a wise grandfather figure who gathers the children around him in order to share his wisdom about life. He has experienced the maze of life, and he knows where the dead ends are, so he can direct us in the way we should go. *Qohelet* has experienced everything, and has come to the conclusion that everything is *hevel* – without meaning, power, value, permanence, or substance. The things of this world are fleeting, like vapor. They promise satisfaction, they shine and shimmer, but those who pursue them will come up empty every time. Have you come to realize that *Qohelet* is right about these things? Why wouldn't someone listen to someone who is so wise and has experienced so much? Why would anyone think they could figure everything out on their own, that they can do better than *Qohelet*, that they could find the thing in this world that will provide true satisfaction? Perhaps it's hard for us to feel what *Qohelet* is saying because we are too distracted and busy with work, school, or family. Young adults today spend their time traveling and gathering as many interesting and wonderful experiences as possible. Perhaps they are too busy checking things off their bucket list to feel the emptiness. But *Qohelet* has experienced it all, he has completed his bucket list, and at the end it was all meaningless. It's not that we should stop having such experiences, but we must put them in perspective and understand the value of what *Qohelet* teaches. We can enjoy these experiences, but let us not make them our life's pursuit, because ultimately they do not satisfy.

Having experienced the emptiness of life, *Qohelet* embarked on a quest to discover meaning, starting with his pursuit of "wisdom" at 1:12. This is not heavenly wisdom, but rather it is worldly wisdom, that by which people become *learned* and *intelligent*. It was the study of literature and philosophy, the intellectual pursuit of knowledge and the satisfaction of curiosity. *Qohelet* was the smart one, the one who had all the answers. But after obtaining this worldly wisdom, his conclusion in v. 15 is that the twisted cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted. He realized that the world cannot be fixed, so this wisdom leads to sorrow (v. 18). The world offers disappointment. You don't have to go far to find examples of how messed up and broken the world is. With all our advancements in technology things are not improving. When I was in school we had earthquake drills, but now we have drills for school shootings.

There have been so many mass shootings that we have almost become numb to it. We find ways to treat so many illnesses, but we create other health problems along the way. Antibiotics were great, but overuse has led to antibiotic resistant superbugs. *Qohelet* has seen it. The world is crooked and people are crooked, and they cannot be straightened out. This is the message given to us in the Bible. Genesis 3 speaks of the curse of sin after the fall. In Romans 8, Paul tells us that creation is groaning for redemption. The world was so crooked that God had to destroy it with a flood and start over from the most righteous man alive. But even Noah got drunk and shamed himself right after the flood, and things went downhill again from there. There is nothing we can do to fix this brokenness. When the woman poured the perfume on Jesus' feet Judas complained that it could have been sold instead to help the poor. But Jesus replied that they would always have the poor, but they wouldn't always have Jesus with them. Jesus is the ultimate *Qohelet*, and He tells us that we will never be able to eliminate poverty. It is a good thing to help the poor, but our eyes should be on Jesus, who is the only one who can fix this broken world.

The activities we do in this world, like golf, can be fun and offer temporary satisfaction, albeit mixed with frustration. We can enjoy them and thank God for them. However, let's keep them in the proper perspective. If we make them our first priority, we will pursue that which is *hevel* at the cost of that which has true value, and we will feel the resulting dissatisfaction and emptiness. Let us listen to and live by the wisdom of *Qohelet*, because it is wisdom from the LORD.