

Teach Us, Qohelet (Part 4)

Ecclesiastes 2:12-26

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Once again, we assemble before our wise old friend *Qohelet*, the teacher and gatherer. He is the family patriarch who imparts wisdom gained from his past mistakes. With age comes wisdom, but *Qohelet*'s wisdom is different than that of others because it came from living a life directed and ordained by God rather than by the world. God put eternity in *Qohelet*'s mind and gave him insight beyond what we can see. Who wouldn't want to listen to him? But so often out of stubbornness and folly we make the same mistakes *Qohelet* warns us against, expecting the outcome will be different for us. This is the same attitude Israel had in the book of Judges. They did what was right in their own eyes and were led down the road of destruction. We must realize we are stubborn and humble ourselves in order to listen to *Qohelet*'s advice. He pursued worldly wisdom, pleasure, and wealth; but he ended up dissatisfied and empty. So let us listen to him, that we may experience that which truly satisfies.

Recall in chapter 1 *Qohelet* tells us that everything is meaningless. He searched for meaning in philosophy but only found emptiness in the realization that the world is irreparably broken. Then in chapter 2 he sought pleasure and indulgence, but found that having more only made him want more, because it did not truly satisfy. So starting from 2:12 he concludes by saying that both wisdom and folly (i.e. the pursuit of pleasure), which he had pursued to a greater extent than any of us could, were meaningless because the same fate overtakes both (v. 14). We see in v. 16 that this fate is death. As we age our perspective changes because we realize that death comes to all of us. We are often so focused on our lives now, but if we remember that we all face death eventually, we will think differently and value different things. Often those who have come back from the brink of death have a new appreciation for life and a realization of what really matters. Experiencing deaths in my family has given me this perspective. But we don't all have to experience this to change our thinking. All we have to do is listen to *Qohelet*.

In vv. 17-23 *Qohelet* continues to talk about death, but this time in relation to our toil. He mentions labor twice in every verse between vv. 18-23. If you realize that death is inevitable, then your view of work will change. We may give our lives to work and accumulating wealth, but in the end all we can do is give it to our successors, who may or may not use it wisely. Solomon's son Rehoboam, who inherited the throne, was a fool who lost most of the kingdom during his reign. No matter how much energy you invest in work, we cannot escape the fate of death. So we should not devote our lives to work. Does your work have the proper place in your life, or does it consume you? As *Qohelet* repeats a few times during these verses, chasing after fulfillment in work is meaningless; it is chasing after the wind. Now this is not to say that work is useless unless it is in a field that directly has eternal value. Every work place needs Christians to be a light to those around them. It's not about where you work but about how you view your work. Can you separate work from family and church? I had a low level QC job which required very little thought after working hours, but so many of us are in higher positions with more stress and responsibility, that it is difficult to keep work at work. But bringing work home doesn't make you a better spouse or a better parent. Why invest so much in something that is meaningless?

The conclusion is in vv. 24-26, which tells us that we should live simply and enjoy the small moments of peace God gives us. The fool gives his life to physical toil, and has no peace

because of mental restlessness, and all for that which is meaningless. Let us find moments of peace and relaxation. Rather than devoting yourselves to the work of your own hands, just finish the tasks that really have to be done, and find time to enjoy God's provision. We know from history that because of *Qohelet's* pursuit of meaningless things, he was not a good father. Let us learn from his mistakes and listen to him.