

Teach Us, Qohelet (Part 21)

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

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Qohelet concludes Ecclesiastes with a reflection on the last twelve chapters, where he boils down all the wisdom he imparted to us, the wisdom given to him by God through his experiences. After reiterating that everything in this world is meaningless (v. 8), *Qohelet* gives us the punch line in vv. 13-14, that there is nothing more important than a proper understanding of your relationship before God. In humility, we must understand our place before Him.

Verses 9-12 speak of *Qohelet*'s wisdom, and how valuable it is. After experiencing so much, he devoted the last stage of his life to distill all his wisdom into this book. This wisdom was given by God, and was built up through all his experiences. Recall that *Qohelet*, who likely is Solomon, searched for meaning in all sorts of things, which he attained only to find that they didn't satisfy. All the things he experienced are more than we could ever attain, yet they were empty. So for us who strive for those things, *Qohelet* tells us to reconsider and stop chasing after the wind. He pursued wealth and amassed more than we could ever dream of, yet it didn't satisfy. He pursued knowledge for the sake of fulfillment. Such hunger for knowledge is something most of us never experienced, since we tend to view education as a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Yet after amassing such knowledge, *Qohelet* was left empty. He pursued achievements, building great monuments that make our achievements seem like nothing. Yet this success did not satisfy. He pursued pleasure, and unlike us he could have anything his heart desired. Yet this too did not satisfy. Satisfaction in this world is always only temporary. The satisfaction vanishes like vapor, leaving us only with a hunger for more. Sushi buffets used to seem so awesome, until I tried high quality sushi. I thought my first car was great, but now it seems like junk. This world teases us with the promise of satisfaction, but the satisfaction is short-lived and we are drawn to seek more, to surpass what we've experienced before. The things of this world are like vapor. Those who seek after them are trapped in an endless quest for more, but the satisfaction evaporates every time they think they have attained it. *Qohelet* turned to toil, to his work, but found that work never ceases and creates endless anxiety rather than satisfaction. Work drains the life out of us, and it is necessary, but it doesn't satisfy. Solomon achieved great success, power, and fame through his reign, more than any of us can hope to achieve. Yet this did not satisfy. His conclusion was that nothing in this world can satisfy.

Then in chapter 3, *Qohelet* tells us that this world is a frustrating mix of good and bad. Whenever we think things are smooth, things go wrong. Right when I thought I had parenting down, we learned that we were having a second child and everything was completely different. Many of us are experiencing turmoil in our family, career, finances, or health. And if things are good in all of these areas, it won't last. It's only a matter of time before something goes bad. And it's out of our control. But when you encounter trouble, don't blame God. The fallen world is just like this; God didn't need to cause bad things to happen. Romans 8:28 doesn't mean God is causing bad things to happen for our good. Rather, tragedy occurs because of the broken state of this world, and God weaves it into His plan, making the outcome something good. It's like that cooking show where the chef must create a gourmet meal out of whatever is in your refrigerator. He's not like the caterer who brings all the ingredients, but rather He works with all the tragedy that is caused by the world and arranges it so that the outcome is according to His perfect will.

Qohelet concludes that in this broken frustrating world where nothing satisfies, the most important thing is to have a proper perspective of who we are in relation to God. He calls us to fear God, which means to be in awe of Him. Recognize how insignificant you are, and humble yourself before Him. God should inspire awe and make us feel small, just like grand national monuments make us feel awe for those presidents to whom they are dedicated. Paul tells us not to think too highly of ourselves but rather to think of ourselves with sober judgement (Romans 12:3). In Numbers 12:3 Moses could humbly say that he was the most humble man in all the earth because he was the only one that spoke to God face to face and experienced His overwhelming glory, which made him realize he was nothing. When we have such humility towards God, we will show humility towards others too, since we are all nothing before God. And when things go wrong, know that it is this sin cursed world that causes tragedy, not God. But we are in the hands of God, who works all things out for the best. Let us stand in awe of Him and His infinite wisdom, and let us humble ourselves and trust in Him.