

## Is Wisdom Better than Foolishness?

Does wisdom benefit those who have it?

Ecclesiastes 2.12–26

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Scripture Reader and Reading: Jake McNeil – Proverbs 3.21–24

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Larry Amberg – No Suggestions

### **Prelude:**

#### **I. When life ends will wisdom have benefited us more than foolishness?**

- A. Here is why I ask that question.
- B. Both the wise man and the foolish man *die*, and
- C. later generations forget both of them.
  - 1. What benefit then did wisdom render?
  - 2. We know instinctively that wisdom supersedes foolishness, but why?
    - a) Why do we want wisdom?
    - b) We know there are good reasons for it, but
      - (1) it is kind of like righteousness,
      - (2) we know of its benefits, yet,
        - (a) it seems the wicked sometimes do better.
        - (b) So it is with wisdom versus foolishness.
          - i) Sometimes the foolish appear to come out ahead.
          - ii) Yet, we still know that wisdom surpasses foolishness.

#### **II. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon revealed that he searched for meaning** (partly courtesy of David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, p. 194),

- A. by being a philosopher, trying to discover the big picture (1.12–15),
- B. by being a student, acquiring wisdom and knowledge (1.16–18),
- C. by being a party animal, enjoying pleasure (2.1–2),
- D. by being a connoisseur of wine (2.3), and
- E. by being a diligent worker, and having pleasure (2.4–11).

### III. Let's find out what else we can learn from him.

#### Persuasion:

#### I. Ecclesiastes 2.12–16 • Is Wisdom Better than Foolishness?

- 12 Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly;  
For what can the man do who succeeds the king?—  
Only what he has already done.**
- 13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly  
As light excels darkness.**
- 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head,  
But the fool walks in darkness.  
Yet I myself perceived  
That the same event happens to them all.**
- 15 So I said in my heart,  
"As it happens to the fool,  
It also happens to me,  
And why was I then more wise?"  
Then I said in my heart,  
"This also is vanity."**
- 16 For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever,  
Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come.  
And how does a wise man die?  
As the fool!**

- A. Solomon considered wisdom, madness and folly, then went to pleasure,
1. finding it to be vain, so,
  2. he went back to wisdom, madness, and folly,
    - a) believing that wisdom held the key to what he was looking for.
    - b) Contrasting wisdom with madness and folly would reveal the answer.
      - (1) Even as black velvet reveals the diamond and
      - (2) not the glass countertop.
- B. He thought of his successor,
1. realizing that he could only do what Solomon had done.
  2. Did Solomon only do what others before him had done?

- a) Does that mean we only do what others before us have done?
  - b) Surely, we make our own unique dent in the world, right?
- C. Solomon saw that even as light exceeds darkness so wisdom exceeds folly.
- 1. Because the wise man's eyes are in his head.
    - a) The wise man knows about life.
      - (1) He thinks.
      - (2) He ponders.
      - (3) He considers.
    - b) He knows of the ultimate double-event that comes to all mankind.
  - 2. The fool's eyes are not in his head, he walks in darkness.
    - a) The fool does not understand life.
    - b) He lives without any thought
      - (1) of the double-event headed everyone's way, or
      - (2) he believes he can escape it.
- D. Nevertheless, the same event happens to both.
- 1. If wisdom exceeds folly as light does darkness,
  - 2. why then does the wise man not avoid death, the ultimate curse?
    - a) What good is wisdom if the wise ends the same as the fool?
    - b) So again, it appears that wisdom leads to vanity.
- E. Are wise people of past generations remembered more than the foolish ones?
- 1. No, not really.
  - 2. We forget them all,
    - a) with a few exceptions of the ones, wise and foolish, who make history.
    - b) How many of us know anything about our great-great grandparents?
- F. So, succeeding generations forget everyone.
- 1. Why is that?

2. Because the wise man dies as the foolish man!

## II. Ecclesiastes 2.17 • The Hatred of Life

**17 Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

- A. The fact that all work done under the sun
  1. is vanity and grasping for the wind,
  2. distressed Solomon,
    - a) knowing that wisdom in all work
    - b) in the end does not benefit the wise man, or
      - (1) so it seems.
      - (2) Knowing and doing a couple of things
        - (a) makes one's wisdom count.
        - (b) Solomon will show those things later.
- B. Therefore, Solomon hated life.
  1. He hated its inequities.
  2. He hated life's harshness and brutality
    - a) in the end for all people,
    - b) even the wise.
- C. What then makes life so that we love it?

## III. Ecclesiastes 2.18–21 • The Hatred of Labor

**18 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because 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 rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity. 20 Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. 21 For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it.**

**This also is vanity and a great evil.**

- A. Then King Solomon the Preacher thought more on his work,
  - 1. realizing that everything he had done,
  - 2. he had to leave to the man who would come after him.
- B. What kind of man would he be?
  - 1. The man to follow Solomon would be his own son Rehoboam.
  - 2. The Book of Proverbs shows Solomon training his son.
    - a) Would his son heed that training?
    - b) He would rule over all that Solomon set up.
      - (1) That made Solomon despair,
      - (2) making him realize again that everything he did was vanity.
        - (a) Therefore, training those who will come after us
        - (b) holds greater importance than doing all our works.
          - i) To what did Jesus give himself?
          - ii) Did he build things or men?
- C. Solomon labored and toiled to establish everything he did.
  - 1. He used wisdom, knowledge, and skill.
  - 2. Then he would have to leave it all to a man who had not labored for it.
    - a) What would be his successor's attitude toward Solomon's works?
    - b) Would the successor make it better or destroy it?
      - (1) Would the successor even know what to do?
      - (2) Such worries can ruin your life.
- D. Solomon concluded that this also was vanity, but then
  - 1. he added something else.
  - 2. He said it was also a great evil or great misfortune.

#### IV. Ecclesiastes 2.22–23 • What Can We Show for Our Labor?

**22 For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? 23 For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.**

- A. What do we have for all our labor?
- B. What do we have for all the striving that occupies our hearts?
  - 1. Most of our days are sorrowful and
  - 2. most of our work is burdensome.
- C. You work during the day, but
  - 1. often at night the heart keeps going,
  - 2. although the body rests or tries to rest.
    - a) Solomon wondered why we do all these things.
    - b) What do we accomplish?
      - (1) By the way, Solomon revealed the reason
      - (2) many people have trouble sleeping:
        - (a) During the night their heart takes no rest.
        - (b) Although tired,
          - i) their heads hit the pillow and
          - ii) their minds continue to think on all kinds of things.
        - (c) The key then is to quit thinking on those things
          - i) that keep us awake.
          - ii) Pray to God for sleep.
            - (1) Thank him for sleep.
            - (2) Tell him why you need the sleep.
              - (a) Keep praying until you fall asleep.
              - (b) Try it and see what happens.

D. Anyway, Solomon declared it all vanity.

V. **Ecclesiastes 2.24–26** • **Enjoy Life**

**24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? 26 For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

A. Suddenly, Solomon took a different turn.

1. He declared that nothing is better for us than
  - a) that we should eat and drink, and
  - b) that our souls should enjoy good in our labor.

B. God's hand gives that to us.

1. God created us to eat and to drink.
2. God created us to labor.
3. God created us to enjoy good in our labor.
  - a) The believer knows that God has given us all things to enjoy.

(1) First Timothy 6.17

**17 “[God]...gives us richly all things to enjoy.**

(2) James 1.17

**17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.**

- b) The believer knows that as God gave before,
  - (1) so he can do it again,
  - (2) if we lose it all.

**9 Then Amaziah said to the man of God, “But what shall we do about the hundred talents which I have given to the troops of Israel?” And the man of God answered, “The LORD is able to give you much more than this.”**

**– 2 Chronicles 25.9**

C. According to verse 25 (NKJV), Solomon had the resources to enjoy all things.

1. Therefore, let us learn from him, and
2. thank God that he only allows us to have so much, for
  - a) we would only come to the same conclusions as Solomon.
  - b) Learn from Solomon’s experiences.

D. Look at what God does.

1. He gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy to a man who is good in his sight.
2. He gives the work of gathering and collecting to the sinner
  - a) that he may give those things
  - b) to him who is good before God.

(1) Proverbs 13.22

**22 ...the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.**

(2) Psalm 105.44–45 speaks of Israel entering the Land of Canaan:

**44 He gave them the lands of the Gentiles,  
And they inherited the labor of the nations,  
45 That they might observe His statutes  
And keep His laws.  
Praise the LORD!**

3. The sinner also enjoys what he gathered and collected.
4. However, the sinner gathers and collects primarily
  - a) for the benefit of God’s people.

- b) If God's people did not exist on the earth,
  - c) there would be no gathering and no collecting.
5. Since
- a) the principalities,
  - b) the powers,
  - c) the rulers of the darkness of this age, and
  - d) the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places
    - (1) seek to silence God in America,
    - (2) does that explain our current national troubles?
      - (a) The world troubles God and his people.
      - (b) Therefore, he troubles the world.
- E. Finally, Solomon again said this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

**Exhortation:**

**I. Let us not complain over what we do not have, but enjoy what God gives.**

**II. What is the point in all that we do?**

A. We are going to die anyway.

B. Who will remember us and what we have done?

1. First Corinthians 15.58

**58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.**

2. First John 2.17

**17 And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.**

**III. You have to be in the Lord for all that you do to profit you.**