

Ecclesiastes 2 - 5

As we continue in Ecclesiastes we must always keep at the forefront that Solomon doesn't hate life, he doesn't think his life or your life is a major waste in and of itself. He, like all of the people of God who came before him, understood that we have been made in the image of God.

Therefore, what God has made is not a waste or meaningless. But, the context of what Solomon is saying, all throughout this book, is when we throw the very Creator to the side and assume we can live independently of Him then we have wasted that which was deemed good by God in the beginning.

And it is in this sense that Solomon can say I hate this life.

Ecclesiastes 2:16-17 ¹⁶ For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man *as* with the fool, inasmuch as *in* the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die! ¹⁷ So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.

And, it is futility, when our eyes are not on the prize, either as believers whom Solomon depicts as the wise, or the unbelievers whom he describes as fools.

A believer's life can appear to be just as meaningless as the unbeliever's life, but only to the extent that the believer walks without hope and without an understanding of his or her role in this world.

I can't tell you how many Christians I've counseled or met or spoke with over the years who are either angry with God or disgusted with their lives or just plain confused about life. And in every one of those situations it had everything to do with how life was beating them up and God didn't seem to care or He just wasn't listening, for whatever reason.

Now, I'm not downplaying the difficulties of life at any point in life. To do so, actually undermines the ability of believers to come alongside other people, be they believer's or unbeliever's, and to recognize the hurts and the fears and the times of lack of faith which we all experience in life.

This is precisely why Paul could say this.

Romans 12:10-17 ¹⁰ *Be* devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

To weep with those who weep, or to persevere in tribulation assumes all of us will find ourselves in those situations. It is when we feel we cannot turn to others for help, especially those of the household of faith, that we are tempted to say with Solomon, I hate this life.

Hating life without a real hope is vanity and meaningless. Hating life with your eyes open to the truth brings joy.

What do I mean by that? Let Solomon expand his thought on hating life in the context of this same chapter.

Ecclesiastes 2:16 ¹⁶ For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man *as* with the fool, inasmuch as *in* the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!

Here Solomon is stating the obvious. Whether you are a child of God or not your fate is the same. You will die and your body will return to the earth. But this is from the perspective of the casual observer who only thinks that this life is the life that matters and therefore he does not look beyond the grave.

Solomon is putting on the glasses of the fool and making a point. Because as he continues he then brings life full circle and gives us the true reality.

Ecclesiastes 2:22-26 ²² For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun? ²³ Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity. ²⁴ There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. ²⁵ For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? ²⁶ For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and

knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

Solomon is saying that you work hard all your life and you have to deal with the stresses of life, as he points out the problem with your mind still racing when you're trying to get to sleep.

And then he says, the ideal situation in life is to understand that a trust in God who provides our needs is where we find our enjoyment. In fact, he says without God there is no enjoyment in pursuing the things of life like our jobs, or relationships.

For the believer who trusts God, the Lord has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of working hard in life with no reward in the long run. And that is vanity and striving after wind.

Back in the mid 1960's the group the Byrd's had a hit called Turn, turn, turn (to everything there is a season). And the lyrics were taken directly from Solomon in chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes. And they were singing it to a generation who pretty much felt that life was meaningless.

The war in Vietnam was escalating, the assassination of John F. Kennedy was fresh in the minds of all. Martin Luther King had also been murdered along with Bobby Kennedy during this time period.

And the attitude was, life is chaotic and no one is safe, therefore let's eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die. Peace, love and pass the joint.

But what Solomon was writing, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is that a life without the Creator God is a life limited only to the usual seasons of life that all people experience. And then you're gone. Or to put in more contemporary colloquial terms, life sucks and then you die.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 ^{NAU} There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven-- ² A time to give birth and a time to die; A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted. ³ A time to kill and a time to heal; A time to tear down and a time to build up. ⁴ A time to weep and a time to laugh; A time to mourn and a time to dance. ⁵ A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing. ⁶ A time to search and a time to give up as lost; A time

to keep and a time to throw away. ⁷ A time to tear apart and a time to sew together; A time to be silent and a time to speak. ⁸ A time to love and a time to hate; A time for war and a time for peace.

But there's one thing that, again, puts all of life into perspective. Does anyone see it in verse one?

Ecclesiastes 3:1 ^{NAU} There is an **appointed time** for everything. And there is a time for every event **under heaven**-- Because of the one who appoints all things.

Why is this important?

Because, from a believer's standpoint, if we don't understand that God is sovereign and has a plan that He is fulfilling in time for His people and all creation, then we fall into the trap of thinking, with the rest of the world who does not understand where life is going, that seasons come and seasons go, and then we die. That's vanity, that's meaningless.

Your life in Christ has meaning, even in the midst of seeming meaninglessness.

For the young Christian mom try explaining the meaningfulness of losing your infant child. For the Christian leader try explaining the meaningfulness of just discovering that you have an incurable cancer. For the Christian missionary try explaining that the people you are trying to reach with the gospel are about to murder you.

When you look at life sometimes is it any wonder that the thought that life is vanity or meaningless doesn't actually ring true?

But this is where having eyes to see and ears to hear makes all the difference in the world. Because we understand that this world is not our home, yet.

And what do we mean by that?

The same thing Abraham meant when he just wandered around the land of Canaan with his family in what, to some, appeared as a meaningless life.

Hebrews 11:8-10 ⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the

same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Abraham was living life just like you and me. He had his trials and tribulations as all of us do. He had his moments of doubt and sin, just like we do. And he was given a promise by God Himself which essentially said, I've got an inheritance for you and I'll let you get a taste of it as you wander on the outskirts of the land. But just know this, you will never attain it in this lifetime.

Now, if Abraham didn't have eyes to see and ears to hear, he could have thrown up his hands and said, what's the point of living life when I will never get to realize all the potential that surrounds me? But Abraham knew what God had promised and because of that he knew this present cursed world was not the prize.

And because of that, and only because of that, he knew that life was worth living to the glory of God in anticipation of being with His creator in the new heavens and new earth which would be his inheritance.

And this is precisely what Solomon speaks of as he adds this to the seasons of life passage.

Ecclesiastes 3:10-12 ¹⁰ I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. ¹¹ He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. ¹² I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime;

That is not vanity or meaningless.

But Solomon continues to drive home his point about life in general and life with God in particular.

Ecclesiastes 4:1-2 ^{NAU} Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold *I saw* the tears of the oppressed and *that* they had no one to comfort *them*; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort *them*. ² So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living.

What is Solomon saying?

It is better to be put out of your misery and lie in the dust than to have to deal with the injustices of life and be tormented during your stay here.

And even if you have someone to support you in this life and to be by your side in this life in the final analysis, without the hope of the promises from God, all is vanity. And Solomon reminds us of this as well.

Ecclesiastes 4:7-10 ⁷ Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. ⁸ There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches *and he never asked*, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task. ⁹ Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. ¹⁰ For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up.

Chapter 5 of Ecclesiastes could be summed up as reverence, humility and contentment.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 ^{NAU} Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. ² Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few.

What do you suppose Solomon means by this?

When you and I are told to go to the house of God and draw near what are we being asked to do?

We are being told to go to the One who resides over the house. The house is God's kingdom with God's people. During the time of Solomon the house of God referred to the place of meeting with God with the holy of holies as the pinnacle of the house.

For you and me today that house of God is His very presence at His throne and we have access to that house through the blood of Christ.

This is what the writer of Hebrews makes clear when he compares the system that Solomon was under and the fulfillment of that old covenant with the new.

Hebrews 10:1-4 ^{NAU} For the Law, since it has *only* a shadow of the good things to come *and* not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? ³ But in those *sacrifices* there is a reminder of sins year by year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Hebrews 10:19-22 ¹⁹ Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, ²¹ and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Solomon was warning the assembly, the church of his day, if you will, that trying to approach God in your own efforts was vanity. That's what he meant by drawing near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools.

The sacrifice of fools was to go through the motions of their religious duties to have access to the house. We need to guard what we know to be true about God and His promises as we listen to what His word says on the issue, as King Saul learned from Samuel when Saul tried to approach God in unrighteousness.

1 Samuel 15:22 ²² Samuel said, "Has the LORD as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams.

To obey is better than sacrifice? What does that mean?

True obedience comes from a true faith. Obedience follows faith as James reminds us in his epistle. Faith without works is dead. And so, our obedience proves our faith as we thank our God with lives of love and obedience to Him.

This is Solomon's point regarding being reverent and humble before God.

But there also needs to be contentment in this life, which at times seems to be meaningless. Now keep in mind the first four and a half chapters of this book could be viewed by some as doom and

gloom and a waste of time to the ear that doesn't hear what the Holy Spirit has revealed in these pages.

And so, when we finally come to a portion that is a bit more encouraging it would behoove us to listen to it.

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 ¹⁸ Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun *during* the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. ¹⁹ Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. ²⁰ For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart.

Solomon is speaking of the person who has put this present life into perspective. He knows that God is the one who has placed him here and it is God who will take care of him while he is here.

But what does he mean in verse 20 when it says that he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart?

It means this man is occupied with the heart of God who is his gladness. And what happens in this life, be it good or bad is designed to help us draw closer to the Lord and glorify Him in the process.

Like that other song of the 60's, Que sera, sera, what will be will be. And it's okay as we trust God for all things. Paul and the writer of Hebrews helps to put Solomon's words into perspective.

1 Timothy 6:7-12 ⁷ For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸ If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. ¹¹ But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

Hebrews 13:5-6 ⁵ *Make sure that* your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU," ⁶ so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"