

“The Common Denominator” (Ecclesiastes 2)(1.22.23)



Ecclesiastes 2:16 (NIV84)

¹⁶ For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered;

in days to come both will be forgotten.

Like the fool, the wise man too must die!

LET US PRAY

Today, we will proceed a little differently. We will start with a single verse, our central verse for today and build from that verse.



Our Teacher is trying to discern the meaning of life. Remember the context is always “under the sun” and “under heaven.”

It may seem strange to us that he says twice in this chapter, I thought in my heart. Our physical heart's position within us yields an obvious metaphor for the center – our center. Mary, Jesus' mother, was said to treasure things she was told in her heart. Often scripture attributes to the heart what we normally associate with our minds: perception, understanding, thinking, imagination, wisdom, and so on. The heart has emotional elements as well, and is said to incline, prompt, be steadfast, willful, and more.

The condition of our heart before God is central. We are called to be pure in heart. There is so much more to be said about the human heart; but, let me just quote the LORD in Jeremiah 17:10 (NIV84)

“I the LORD search the heart
and examine the mind,
to reward a man according to his conduct,
according to what his deeds deserve.”

Qoheleth, our teacher and preacher, says that his heart could experience pleasure and delight. When he says, “I said in my heart” he is referring to having an internal dialogue. Don't we do that all the time?



There is a common denominator that determines the answers, the conclusions, to which he comes. Therefore, I thought it might be helpful for us to have a short simple lesson on junior high math with fractions.



$$\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{6} =$$



Does anyone know the common denominator for these fractions?

Numerator

Denominator

Multiplying by 1 does not change the value.



$$\frac{6}{12} + \frac{4}{12} + \frac{3}{12} + \frac{2}{12} =$$

We multiply each fraction by 1:



$$\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{6}{6}$$

$$\frac{1}{3} \times \frac{4}{4}$$

$$\frac{1}{4} \times \frac{3}{3}$$

$$\frac{1}{6} \times \frac{2}{2}$$



Qoheleth says that explicitly in our central verse (16). Let us look at other ways he expresses this thought in this chapter.

In verse 3: I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives.

In verse 12: he refers to "the king's successor."

In verse 14: The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness;

but I came to realize

that the same fate overtakes them both.

In verse 15: "The fate of the fool will overtake me also.

What then do I gain by being wise?"

In verse 18: I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.

In verse 21: For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it.



Verse 1 & 2: I thought in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. 2 "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?"

Verse 10: I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;

I refused my heart no pleasure.



Verse 3: I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom.

Verse 4: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards.

Many people are confused about alcohol and the Bible. Wine is often described as a gift from God – the wine of gladness; but, there are many stern warnings also. Here is one such admonition from King Solomon:

Proverbs 23:29–32 (NIV84)

29 Who has woe? Who has sorrow?

Who has strife? Who has complaints?

Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes?

30 Those who linger over wine,
who go to sample bowls of mixed wine.

31 Do not gaze at wine when it is red,
when it sparkles in the cup,
when it goes down smoothly!

32 In the end it bites like a snake
and poisons like a viper.



Verses 7 & 8: 7 I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces.

Remember, this is scripture is filled with many autobiographical references. King Solomon's wealth was literally world renown.



Verse 8: I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man.

Note: The scriptures report that King Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. You might argue that the wives helped keep peace with surrounding nations as they cemented alliances with the ruling monarchies; thus, leading to prosperity. The problem with that argument is the concubines don't fit into the equation.



Verse 2: "Laughter," I said, "is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?"

Verse 3: embracing folly

Verse 12: Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom,

and also madness and folly.

Verse 13: I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.

Verse 14: the fool walks in darkness

And there are three other references comparing the fate of the fool and the wise man.



Verse 9: In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

Verse 12: Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom

Verse 21: For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it.

Verse 26: To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness



Verses 4-6: 4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees.

Because we know that death awaits every one of us, we want to leave our mark on the world. We want to leave a legacy. Some do it by putting their names on statues, or buildings, hospitals, and libraries. Others want to make a NAME for themselves – to become famous. So, I am going to include verse 9 here: I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me.



Verse 10: My heart took delight in all my work,
and this was the reward for all my labor.

Verse 11: Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had
done

and what I had toiled to achieve

Verse 19: Yet he will have control over all the work into
which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun.

Verse 20: So my heart began to despair over all my
toilsome labor under the sun.

Verse 22-23: What does a man get for all the toil and
anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All
his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his
mind does not rest.



$$\frac{1}{0} =$$

It is undefined – it is meaningless
Explain

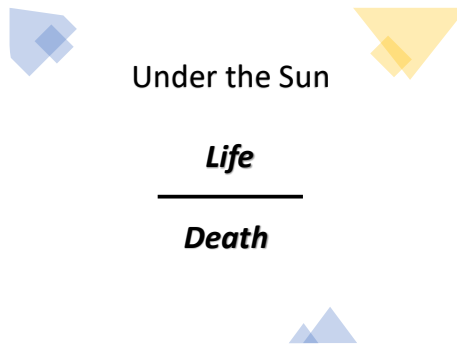


Under the Sun

Death = 0

If our perspective is solely this
world and this life, when we end up
in the graveyard it all ends.





Death – Under the Sun – is a zeroness, a nothingness
Qoheleth looks at ever aspect of his life in the context of impending death and finds that it is meaningless and chasing after the wind. He says this over and over again in this chapter:

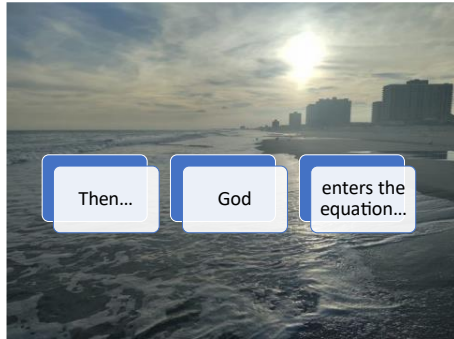
- *meaningless is the last word of the first verse
- *Five time he says, this too is meaningless
- *All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. (vs 17)
- *everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. (vs 11)



Because it was all meaningless, what was Qoheleth's response? I hated life, he declared.

Verse 17: So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me.

Verse 18: I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.



Verses 24-26: A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God.

With God, everything is reframed. Our whole perspective on life changes. Truth is not limited by human understanding or existence under the sun, under heaven. Qoheleth discerns that when we see the simple and ordinary things of life as a gift of God, they have true value and meaning.

1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV84)

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

In Ray C. Stedman's book, *Is This All There Is to Life? – Answers from Ecclesiastes*, he put it this way: "Isn't it strange that the more you run after life, panting after every pleasure, the less you will find, but the more you take life as a gift from God's hand, responding in thankful gratitude for the delight of the moment, the more life seems to come to you?"

Colossians 3:16–17 (NIV84)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



To find meaning in life:



Life

Death

X One

Jesus Christ is Jesus the Anointed
ONE



Jesus promises in John 14:19 (NIV84)

"Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live."

My friends, for Christians, death is not the common denominator. For us, it is eternal life with Jesus our Savior and our Heavenly Father. Our salvation is sealed by God the Holy Spirit! (Ephesians 4:30)

Amen and amen. Let us pray.