

“Chasing After the Wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:12-18)(1.15.23)

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 (NIV84) *Wisdom Is Meaningless*

¹² I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! ¹⁴ I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

¹⁵ What is twisted cannot be straightened;

what is lacking cannot be counted.

¹⁶ I thought to myself, “Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” ¹⁷ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

¹⁸ For with much wisdom comes much sorrow;

the more knowledge, the more grief.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“Chasing After the Wind”**

INTRODUCTION:

Do you feel like it is hard to keep up with all the happenings and advancements in today’s fast changing world? The technology can be overwhelming. There is a flood of information that washes over us each and every day. Many of us have taken steps to isolate ourselves from information and sensory overload.

Here is article from the website “Concerning Truth.”

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By the turn of the nineteenth-century, knowledge had doubled once every 100 years. By 1950, knowledge doubled every 25 years. Today the astounding increase in knowledge is doubling every year and soon expected to double once a day. This rapid accumulation

of information can, of course, be attributed to computers and the internet. The super smart computer can collect, store, and integrate data in seconds by reading cyberspace at will. Given enough information the giant computers can reason and solve problems on their own. The one capacity Artificial intelligent computers don't possess is conscience. The world is changing at the same exponential rate that knowledge increases. To some, it represents progress, to others a clear and present danger.

There is no question that advanced technologies have led the way toward conquering disease, wiping out hunger, changing methods of travel and much more innovative, if not provocative ways, to aid the human experience. It is estimated that within the next 5 years, self-propelled cars will become available ending the way we travel forever. The Hyperloop is an electromagnetic propulsion system that can transport passengers at 700 miles an hour. It is being tested in multiple locations across the globe. A handheld multiple data collector (Tricorder) is being developed for the ordinary cell phone that can recognize and analyze multiple diseases. It's your personal doctor in a pocket. China has constructed a six-story building using a 3D printer.

Technologies are breeding themselves daily, changing the way we think, act, and live. If you haven't recognized the rapidly changing landscape, you are just not paying attention. Daniel was given a prophetic warning about a future time when transportation and knowledge would increase exponentially. *"But Daniel, keep this prophecy a secret; seal it up so that it will not be understood until the end times when travel and education shall be vastly increased!"* (Da.12:4) This prediction is no longer a secret. It is easily understood because we are witness to these signs and wonders. Regardless of how beneficial the technology is, it does not alter the nature of degenerate men. The end of time as we know it is upon us. All believers should pay close attention to world conditions so as not to be caught unaware.

BODY:

Some commentators say that the Book of Ecclesiastes is the most contemporary book in the Bible. You could say that this quest for wisdom is as old as human consciousness. There is certainly something within each of us that desires answers to life's mysteries.

Where does the title, Ecclesiastes, come from? Well, the Hebrew name for this book is Qoheleth. It means "one who gathers." The idea is that the Teacher or Preacher has gathered an assembly of students to share what he has learned.

Ekklesia is a Greek word defined as **"a called-out assembly or congregation."** Ekklesia is commonly translated as "church" in the New Testament. For example, Acts 11:26 says

that “Barnabas and Saul met with the church [ekklesia]” in Antioch. And in 1 Corinthians 15:9 Paul says that he had persecuted the church [ekklesia] of God.”

So, Ecclesiastes, is a derivative of ekklesia. And, Qoheleth is the teacher – the central character in this book. Tradition tells us that King Solomon is the author though this is subject to scholarly debate. It certainly fits the profile of an autobiographical account of Solomon’s life. Some argue that Ecclesiastes could not have been written in Solomon’s day, almost three thousand years ago, because there are some Persian words used that would make it about 500 years after Solomon.

In any case, it is an ancient text and points to the wisdom of Solomon, the wisest man to ever live. Who says so? In Matthew 12:42 (NIV84) Jesus says,

⁴² “The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.”

Of course, the One greater than Solomon is Jesus himself. But there are other witnesses to Solomon’s wisdom too. We have the scriptures; the Queen of Sheba; and, Qoheleth too.

1 Kings 4:29–34 (NIV84) *Solomon’s Wisdom*

²⁹ God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. ³⁰ Solomon’s wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. ³² He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. ³³ He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. ³⁴ Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

1 Kings 10:2–5 (NIV84)

² Arriving at Jerusalem with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all that she had on her mind. ³ Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. ⁴ When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built, ⁵ the food on his table, the seating of his officials,

the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers, and the burnt offerings he made at the temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed.

1 Kings 10:7 (NIV84) But I [the Queen of Sheba] did not believe these things until I came and saw with my own eyes. Indeed, not even half was told me; in wisdom and wealth you have far exceeded the report I heard.

1 Kings 10:23 (NIV84) King Solomon was greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth.

And now Qoheleth sharing an autobiographical quote from Solomon: “Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” And, what was the conclusion of his investigation – it was a chasing after the wind, which he says twice within four verses.

Chasing after the wind certainly seems like vanity, a meaningless venture. All the more so when you consider the example given earlier in the chapter: “The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.” It is a merry-go-round that never stops, but just keeps speeding up. And, you can feel the rush of the wind against your face.

Chasing AFTER the wind, puts you behind it at every turn. This concept of futility related to the wind is expressed in a variety of ways: pursue the wind; embrace the wind; striving after the wind; and, feeding on the wind. The King James Version characterizes this chase as “vexation of spirit.” We can certainly see why?

This characterization also fits with Qoheleth’s conclusions that the seeking after wisdom is a heavy burden that God has laid on men! It is a burden because there is a direct and corollary connection between wisdom and sorrow, between knowledge and grief. You have all heard the aphorism that ignorance is bliss.

Solomon’s wisdom was a burden in many ways. Think about his workload as so many came to hear him speak. There were huge expectations for him to live up to. If you had been blessed with such extensive knowledge, wouldn’t you feel compelled to share it. Surely that is why he spoke and wrote so much.

Wouldn’t there be a great loneliness for such a wise person? There would be a personal loneliness simply from being the king. On top of that, it would be pretty awkward trying to talk to a person who knew a hundred times more than you do. Sometimes, we wish we didn’t know things about other people, right?

There would be another phenomenon to weigh you down. The more you know, the more you know you don't know. I will give you a small scale personal example.

I have played tournament chess since I was in high school. In my home office there is a small bookcase with four shelves holding chess books. I have also owned chess software and computers. I stopped buying chess books when I realized I couldn't remember all that was in the ones I already had. And, the stronger I became and the more tournament success I had at the local level, I realized how great the gulf was between me and the best players. That knowledge gave me a vexation of spirit.

Studying for this sermon brought a short story to my mind, one I read in high school. It is titled, "The Bet," and was written by the Russian Anton Chekhov. The basic plot is that a banker has a bet with a lawyer. The bet is that the lawyer would not be able to live in isolation, solitary confinement, in a cottage on the banker's estate for 15 years. He would have all his physical needs met and other benefits, but no human contact and his only contact with the outside world was through one small window. If he lasted the 15 years, the banker would pay him 2 million rubles.

"For the first year of his confinement, as far as one could judge from his brief notes, the prisoner suffered severely from loneliness and depression. The sounds of the piano could be heard continually day and night from his lodge. He refused wine and tobacco. Wine, he wrote, excites the desires, and desires are the worst foes of the prisoner; and besides, nothing could be more dreary than drinking good wine and seeing no one. And tobacco spoils the air of his room.

In the first year the books he sent for were principally of a light character; novels with a complicated love plot, sensational and fantastic stories, and so on. In the second year the piano was silent in the lodge, and the prisoner asked only for the classics. In the fifth year music was audible again, and the prisoner asked for wine. Those who watched him through the window said that all that year he spent doing nothing but eating and drinking and lying on his bed, frequently yawning and angrily talking to himself. He did not read books. Sometimes at night he would sit down to write; he would spend hours writing, and in the morning tear up all that he had written. More than once he could be heard crying.

In the second half of the sixth year the prisoner began zealously studying languages, philosophy, and history. He threw himself eagerly into these studies - so much so that the banker had enough to do to get him the books he ordered.

In the course of four years some six hundred volumes were procured at his request. It was during this period that the banker received the following letter from his prisoner:

"My dear Jailer, I write you these lines in six languages. Show them to people who know the languages. Let them read them. If they find not one mistake I implore you to fire a shot in the garden. That shot will show me that my efforts have not been thrown away. The geniuses of all ages and of all lands speak different languages, but the same flame burns in them all. Oh, if you only knew what unearthly happiness my soul feels now from being able to understand them!" The prisoner's desire was fulfilled. The banker ordered two shots to be fired in the garden.

Then after the tenth year, the prisoner sat immovably at the table and read nothing but the Gospel. It seemed strange to the banker that a man who in four years had mastered six hundred learned volumes should waste nearly a year over one thin book easy of comprehension. Theology and histories of religion followed the Gospels.

In the last two years of his confinement the prisoner read an immense quantity of books quite indiscriminately. At one time he was busy with the natural sciences, then he would ask for Byron or Shakespeare. There were notes in which he demanded at the same time books on chemistry, and a manual of medicine, and a novel, and some treatise on philosophy or theology. His reading suggested a man swimming in the sea among the wreckage of his ship, and trying to save his life by greedily clutching first at one spar and then at another."

On the night before his 15 years were to be completed, the lawyer wrote the banker a letter:

"Tomorrow at twelve o'clock, I regain my freedom and the right to associate with other men, but before I leave this room and see the sunshine, I think it necessary to say a few words to you. With a clear conscience I tell you, as before God, who beholds me, that I despise freedom and life and health, and all that in your books is called the good things of the world.

"For fifteen years I have been intently studying earthly life. It is true I have not seen the earth nor men, but in your books I have drunk fragrant wine, I have sung songs, I have hunted stags and wild boars in the forests, have loved women ... Beauties as ethereal as clouds, created by the magic of your poets and geniuses, have visited me at night, and have whispered in my ears wonderful tales that have set my brain in a whirl.

In your books I have climbed to the peaks of Elburz and Mont Blanc, and from there I have seen the sun rise and have watched it as evening flooded the sky, the ocean, and the mountain-tops with gold and crimson. I have watched from there the lightning flashing over my head and cleaving the storm clouds. I have seen green forests, fields, rivers, lakes, towns. I have heard the singing of the sirens, and the strains of the

shepherds' pipes; I have touched the wings of comely devils who flew down to converse with me of God ...

In your books I have flung myself into the bottomless pit, performed miracles, slain, burned towns, preached new religions, conquered whole kingdoms ... "Your books have given me wisdom. All that the unresting thought of man has created in the ages is compressed into a small compass in my brain.

I know that I am wiser than all of you. "And I despise your books, I despise wisdom and the blessings of this world. It is all worthless, fleeting, illusory, and deceptive, like a mirage. You may be proud, wise, and fine, but death will wipe you off the face of the earth as though you were no more than mice burrowing under the floor, and your posterity, your history, your immortal geniuses will burn or freeze together with the earthly globe.

"You have lost your reason and taken the wrong path. You have taken lies for truth, and hideousness for beauty. You would marvel if, owing to strange events of some sorts, frogs and lizards suddenly grew on apple and orange trees instead of fruit, or if roses began to smell like a sweating horse; so I marvel at you who exchange heaven for earth. I don't want to understand you"

This no longer young lawyer learned things that he wished he didn't know. His heart and mind were so burdened that even though he could have requested any food and drink he wanted, he became emaciated and frail. He echoed Qoheleth – Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. The pursuit of knowledge was chasing after the wind. Around and around it goes and comes back to the same place.

CONCLUSION:

Most of you know, that our time on the Internet is monitored. They have algorithms that try to ensure they are feeding you content that causes you to see targeted advertising. If you search for a car, you begin to see lots of car advertising on your feed. That is how my attention was brought to a booklet published in 2020.

"This booklet provides the ideal, very short, introductory summary of Jeremy Griffith's book *FREEDOM: The End Of The Human Condition*. He is an Australian biologist. The End Of The Human Condition is the holy grail of insight we have sought for the psychological rehabilitation of the human race. This is the book we have been waiting for, it is the book that saves the world," according to Professor Harry Prosen, former president of the Canadian Psychiatric Association."

My very short summation of Griffith's hypothesis: The human race suffers collectively from psychosis. This is because our basic understanding of human nature is wrong. Evil is the symptom of that psychosis because the natural state of man is one of goodness, compassion, and cooperation. Here are a few quotes from the booklet:

"This story of Adam and Eve becoming conscious could only conclude that the angry, egocentric and alienated condition that emerged when we became **conscious** was a bad, evil, sinful state, but this scientific presentation says, 'No, no, that story got it wrong'. Adam and Eve are actually **not just good but the heroes of the whole story of life on Earth**—because surely the conscious mind is nature's greatest invention and to be given the task of searching for understanding while the whole world's condemning you was the hardest and toughest of tasks—because that condemnation was universal."

"We 2-million-year psychologically upset humans needed to be able **to think our way to sanity.**"

Near the end, he quotes poet T.S. Eliot: "We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

Wait a second. Doesn't that sound like Qoheleth chasing after the wind? Yes it does. Yes it does. The holy scriptures contradict Jeremy Griffith, biologist, in several ways. Qoheleth categorically disagrees with his assertion that we can think our way to sanity – meaning eliminate sin and evil. But what Griffith does confirm is that the human intellect is tragically flawed. His book will NOT save the world.

John 3:17 (NIV84) "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." Luke 19:10 (NIV84) "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

I will close with one of Solomon's Proverbs 25:2 (NIV84)

² It is the glory of God to conceal a matter;

to search out a matter is the glory of kings.

My friends, Jesus is the revelation that answers our questions. Come to Him and see.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.