

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF SOLOMON

STUDY NUMBER #20 – ECCLESIASTES 2:12-26

In episode Chapter 20 in Ecclesiastes 2 we were picking up in the twentieth episode of the life of Solomon. The reason I am jumping around is because I am trying to make a chronological sequence of his life by these various sections of scripture. We ascertained last week that he is in the last sixteen years of his life. When we finished the third part of the life of Solomon he was at the top of his game. That is where we were last week as we started. But I shared with you little things make a big difference. There were four very obvious violations to the Law of God that Solomon was participating in.

- 1) He was not to multiply gold for himself
- 2) He was not to multiply wives for himself
- 3) He was not to multiply horses and
- 4) He was not to do business in Egypt and that is where he was getting his horses.

Those seem like little things but it is those little things in our lives that create the ultimate havoc. What we are talking about here is the things that bring us to the great demise. When we go back to the historical record next week in Episode 21 you are going to be shocked by some of the things you are going to hear. Solomon has had an incredible career. He has accomplished so much but there are critical decisions we make in our lives to cease

to be what we need to be because we become selfish and hedonistic. I think Solomon has done that. Last week we saw he was committed to PLEASURE and PROJECTS. He wanted to try wine, wanted to build lots of fancy things, he has a harem to please the heart of every man and he is in the precious metals and commodity market, and in the cattle and ranch business. We saw all of this that he has described to us last week and he still says having all of that brings about nothing that is of value under the sun and it is meaningless. As we pick up today our hero is continuing on to reflect on these decisions he has made to live this kind of life.

v. 12 Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done?

It says I turned my heart to consider wisdom and also madness and folly. In this passage you are going to see five questions that he asks. Built on those five questions you can understand what he is going through right now because of some of these decisions he has made.

Question 1) What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done?

I get the idea that he is running out of projects to fill twenty-four hours a day. I think he knows he has done it, been there, done that, what else is there that is new? He is proud of what he has accomplished by saying: "WHAT

MORE CAN THE KING'S SUCCESSOR DO THAT HAS NOT ALREADY BEEN DONE?"

The old cowboy said it well:

“He’s walkin’ in my tracks but he can’t fill my shoes.”

There’s nobody that is going to be in a position, in the immediate future, from Solomon’s perspective that is going to be making \$67,000,000 per year and to accomplish everything he did, there is nobody around that is going to do that.

Are you concerned in the first part of the verse he says, “I thought of my heart to consider wisdom and then madness and folly!” How did we get madness and folly in this? Because last week he was talking about wisdom and experiencing pleasure. Why does he change the word pleasure to madness and folly? Because that is exactly what it is. When you endeavor to try to fill twenty-four hours of your life a day with pleasure and all the amenities of a totally selfish hedonistic lifestyle it is going to become to you madness and folly. He has at least had enough of it to call “a spade a spade”. He has had enough of it so that he can really talk to you about your fantasies and about the things that you think would really make you happy if you had them. Isn’t it amazing that when you and I or, the children of Israel or God Himself chooses a leader what is the purpose and what is the mission of that leader? What is his number one mission and priority? To serve the interest of his

constituency. To be a sacrificial servant. To accomplish the agenda of the kingdom for the people. That was Solomon's mandate from God alone because when he started out on this he said I don't have enough wisdom to do all of this, so God would you give me wisdom so I can do that. God graciously has given him the wisdom. Throughout his kingdom it has been noted by the marvelous insights and wisdom that is there. What I am saying, there comes a time when every leader is tempted to turn all of the advantages of position and power for personal pleasure. When you do that you cease to serve. There are so many senior citizens in America who are following the cultural line. At sixty-five you switch over from servant-hood to entitlement. You switch over to enjoying the last part because you don't have much left. It is like society gives us an excuse to cease to serve. When you cease to serve you have just run it off the freeway. It's a serious decision that we make when we chose to be the recipients of what we have accumulated rather than to continue to be a servant. Here is a brief example. We have lived today, now reflect back on today. What is it about today that brings you the most joy as you are sitting here listening to the study? Everyone of you are going to have one thing in common and that one thing that is going to bring you the most joy and give you warm fuzzies in your heart is what you did for somebody else. Whether it was your husband, your child, whether for a customer, or for an employee or for someone else. It is what you did to serve them. The Lord said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. There is some strange thing that happens in the heart of a person in a

leadership position like Solomon that comes about where the temptation is so real to use all of these amenities for personal pleasure. That is why he says I chose to consider wisdom but also madness and folly.

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

What he is telling you here is that wisdom is better than pleasure, madness and folly and I illustrate it by saying it is just like light and darkness. Can you think of anything in the Bible where there are passages of scripture that talk about light and darkness.

John 3:19-21 This is the verdict; Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

v. 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.

The difference between walking in wisdom and walking in folly is the difference between walking in the light and walking in the darkness. What happens when you walk

in the darkness? You don't know where you are going. You are probably going to stumble and fall.

Proverbs 4:18-19 The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.

Just like Solomon says, to walk around and going from pleasure to pleasure to pleasure with no meaning and purpose in my life is like walking in darkness. The next phrase **"BUT I CAME TO REALIZE THAT THE SAME FATE OVERTAKES THEM BOTH."** In verse 12 **"I turned my thoughts to consider"**. In verse 14 **"I came to realize."** You might be thinking, at least Solomon is not living in denial, at least Solomon is not living in rejection but he came to realize some of these things." I say, "that is great but I have a problem". He came to realize it but he was so enslaved to it that he couldn't do anything about it or at least he wouldn't do anything about it because when we get into the next episode he is on a slide that he can't stop or that he won't stop! It is one thing to sit here in a Bible study and realize what you need to be doing, it's another thing to go out of here and "put your money where your mouth is"! Let the Spirit of God help you see reality and realize it and then begin to live in view of your realization.

What has come into the equation now that has Solomon all upset? The fool and the wise man both are going to

die. The rich man and the poor man both are going to die.

v. 15 Then I thought in my heart, “The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?” I said in my heart, “This too is meaningless.”

Do you get the feeling that each one of these verses that it is a “HEART” matter. Because he keeps talking about his HEART.

See verse 12: “I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom”.

Verse 14 “I came to realize.”

Now in verse 15 “I thought in my heart, the fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?” I said in my heart, “This too is meaningless.”

Now there is your second question.

Question 1) What more can the King's successor do than what has already been done?

Question 2) What then do I gain by being wise?”

Sure we can have all kinds of degrees after our names but we are all going to die and he says, “this too is meaningless”. That word meaningless is going to occur six times here in these remaining verses as he reflects on this.

v. 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!

The reason he is having a hard time with his lifestyle and where he is right now is for three reasons; the overriding principle is the wise and the fool are both going to die:

- 1) Will not be long remembered;
- 2) Both will be forgotten, and
- 3) We both must die

I found this statement the other day: After the game the King and the Pawn both go back in the same box. Think about that. Now, David, his daddy said that:

Psalm 49:10 For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others

These are the **KEY WORDS** that jump out at us in these next verses. I came up with **NINE** of them:

1. FATE
2. GAIN
3. REMEMBERED
4. FORGOTTEN
5. DIE
6. LEAVE
7. CONTROL

8. DESPAIR, and a
9. GREAT MISFORTUNE

When you look at those words in the text and you come to them now kind of let them jump out at you. In essence the Nobel Prize Winner and the guy who can't sign his own name are both going to die. Should that make a Christian unhappy? This is the most un-Christian thought pattern and you can't believe it is coming from Solomon. You and I should both be excited if we are truly laying up our treasures in heaven and we have our affections set on things above and not things on the earth. We should be glad today we are closer to the BIG TRIP when we are going to be with ONE WHO WOULD RATHER DIE THAN LIVE WITHOUT US! I mean that is exciting to think one of these days we will be home.

When you go through a traumatic insight you come to a realization and then you blurt out the first thought that you have after that insight and it doesn't sound very good. I think verses 17 and 18 are like that. I think Solomon is under incredible stress to know that life has gotten away from him and he is not going to end up like his Daddy, in that he is going to fail. I think he is far enough over the crest to see him-self going down the other side and so what he is saying now is the fruit of what he has done through his indulgences.

v. 17 So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, chasing after the wind.

There are your three phrases, you had when the study ended; chasing after the wind, under the sun and it is meaningless. It also occurs back in Chapter 1 verse 14. There is your second occurrence of the word “MEANINGLESS”. In verse 17 he says, “I hated life”. Why did he hate life? Because he is not going to be long remembered, he is going to be forgotten and he is going to die. Now twenty-one times the little words “I”, “ME” and “MY” occur and we had it about twenty-five times last week. This little statement is there too and this is kind of convicting. My intense of our unhappiness is selfishness and is an insult cast into the face of God. Nine-tenths of our unhappiness is selfishness and for Solomon to say, “I hate life” is to put himself in the same position the children of Israel did in the wilderness when they were griping and complaining as the way the Lord was ordering their menu, ordering their trail and their provisions. The Lord didn’t take lightly to that. Just go back to the book of Numbers where you see the plague of the snakes that come and take about 23,000 of them out of here and every time they grumbled against the leadership or they grumbled against the Lord, the Lord was really hurt by that and took acts of justice and judgment in such a situation. So he says, “I hate life” why? Because the work that I do is meaningless.

(The Book of Wisdom by Multnomah Books)

Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT
Labor Day address, Syracuse, N.Y. 1903

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The old cowboy said, “Nobody drowns himself in his own sweat!” Work is not going to hurt you. The other problem is you can go clear over to the other side. When people start dancing to the pleasure drummer then the hooks get set and they become workaholics because they have to get as much as they can to accumulate so they don’t miss anything in life. They pour themselves into intense activities so they don’t have time for devotional time with the Lord, they don’t have time to be at the church, they don’t have time for Bible Study and time for friends because they have to work. Then they get completely out of balance.

Ann Landers has one of the cutest pieces on that:

One out of four people in this country is mentally imbalanced. Think of your three closet friends. If they seem okay, then you’re the one.

Ann Landers

(From InfoSearch 3:51)

v. 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.

Somebody is going to get all my “toys” when I am out of here. I can’t take them with me. I am going to have to give them up to somebody else. He hated life in verse 17, now I hate all things verse 18, because I have to leave them to the one who comes after me.

Luke 12:19-20 And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and be merry.” But God said to him, “You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?”

You see the key to negotiating life is to always live with eternity’s values in view.

Will Rogers tells us the mystery so clearly:

“Too many people spend money they haven’t earned, to buy things they don’t want, to impress people they don’t like” (Tan 1984, 826).

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(Churchill on Courage: Wisdom for Perseverance by Frederick Talbott)

What is the use of living if it be not to strive for noble

causes and to make this muddled world a better place for those who will live in it after we are gone?

Winston Churchill
Dundee, October 9, 1908

(quote 7)

When you get to verse 19 you get the feeling that Solomon is very uncomfortable because of his kids. I will explain in a minute.

v. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.

One of the common problems that Solomon has with his Father is that he was a very poor daddy! When you see the kids that David reared and the relationship David had with them you can make no other observation that he failed as a father. We don't have any record of Solomon's relationship with his kids except when he died. When Solomon dies it is very sad.

1 Kings 11:43 Then he rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. And Rehoboam his son succeeded him as king.

Rehoboam goes to the old gray heads that have been sitting in the Senate and House of Representatives and

says, “Guys what should I do to make this kingdom more successful?” They said, “Be a sacrificial servant and the people will do anything for you.” But, he goes to the college guys from graduate school and they said, “make it tougher than your daddy”. Just whip them and tell them they are going to be in pain serving you. He went along with the agenda of the young guys and guess what, he split the kingdom! You have Israel in the North; Judah in the South and within six months Egypt has invaded the lands. They have stolen all the gold and everything Solomon has accumulated in the temple and the city.

(God’s Little Devotional Book for Leaders by Honor Books, Inc.)

Don’t let “Well done” on your tombstone mean you were cremated!

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

Let me reflect here, there is a phrase here I want you to see:

verse 15 “*I thought in my Heart*” “*I said in my Heart*”
verse 20 “*So my Heart began to Despair*”.

You could be sitting here right now and are despairing? Why does Solomon render the verdict “*MY HEART BEGAN TO DESPAIR*”. I came up with two answers.

- 1) He is living in the wrong way**
- 2) He is living for the wrong things.**

If despair fills your heart today listen, come to realize and seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, then these other things will fall into line and take care of themselves.

v. 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. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune.

What is the GREAT MISFORTUNE ? Visa and MasterCard and all these other things; there is some stuff in life they can't cover. Solomon is becoming painfully aware of that. But that is so foreign to you and me as a believer today.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Solomon is paying the price of living for the here and now. He has gotten caught up in it.

It makes all the difference in the word when we are beating that drum and living that kind of life. We know we are here as temporary pilgrims passing through.

v. 22 What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?

There is question #4. You get the feeling he is stressed out that he has made a premature verdict! He says some things, what do I get for this?

v. 23 All his days his work is pain and grief even at night his mind is not resting. This too is meaningless.

You see he has gotten so consumed and wrapped up that he is so stressed out he can't even go to bed at night and turn it off. His mind does not rest, he is filled with grief, it is painful, then he says it is MEANINGLESS! He is caught up in this and he can't release himself from it!

(God's Little Devotional book for Leaders by Honor Books, Inc.)

A small town chamber of commerce once invited a man to address their annual banquet. The speaker was asked to be motivational, since the town's economy had been bad that year and people were discouraged.

During his presentation, the speaker took a large piece of white paper and made a black dot in the

center of it with a marking pen. He then held the paper up before the audience and asked, “What do you see?” One person replied, “I see a black dot.” The speaker said, “Fine. What else do you see?”

Others chimed in, “A black dot.” The speaker asked, “Don’t you see anything besides the dot?” The audience responded with a resounding “No!”

But you’ve overlooked the most important thing,” the speaker replied. “You’ve missed seeing the sheet of paper!” He then went on to explain, “In our lives, we are often distracted by small, dot-like failures. They keep us from seeing the blessings, successes, and joys that are far more important than the disappointment that try to monopolize our energy and attention. I encourage you to focus on the big picture of what is right rather than the small view of what is wrong.”

Are you so preoccupied today with what is, that you’ve lost sight of what can be? Step back and see the bigger picture!

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Don’t get stressed out over the black dot of what you do as your profession and your career because you are not indispensable. You are going to go out of here just like I am too. We are here for a brief period of time. We can all

confess that we are in the prime of our senility so let's just enjoy it! Live life to the fullest, be a good witness and take as many people with us when we leave.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

v. 24 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.

v. 25 for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

v. 26 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. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

As Solomon comes to this point, he could have satisfaction, he could have enjoyment, he could have happiness if he would simply allow God to be first in his life and continue to serve the people as a sacrificial servant and become a faithful king who finishes the task.

Isaiah 49:3-4 He said to me, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor. But I said, “I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my

**strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me
is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God."**

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: "Nine-tenths of our unhappiness is selfishness and is an insult cast in the face of God"

LESSON #2: A man shows what he is by what he does with what he has.

LESSON #3: Once the game is over the king and pawn go back in the same box.

LESSON #4: The key words in the passage are "fate," "gain", "remembered," "forgotten," "die," "leave," "control," "despair," and "great misfortune."

LESSON #5: The wise and fool alike are going to die, "they will not be long remembered" and "both will be forgotten."

LESSON #6: Solomon has come to the painful realization that when he dies, he must leave everything behind that he has toiled for through the years of his life.

LESSON #7: will the person who inherits the fruit of his

labor be a wise man or a fool?

LESSON #8: The fruit of pleasing God is three-fold: (1)“satisfaction” (verse 24); (2) “enjoyment” (verse 25), and (3) “happiness” (verse 26).

LESSON #9: Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

LESSON #10: “He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, and you will bring me glory.’ I replied, ‘But my work all seems so useless! I have spent my strength for nothing and to no purpose at all. Yet I leave it all in the Lord’s hand; I will trust God for my reward’ (Isaiah 49:3-4).

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF SOLOMON

STUDY NUMBER TWENTY — ECCLESIASTES 2:12-26

Notes

2:12 Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done?

2:13 I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.

2:14 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.

2:15 Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless."

2:16 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!

2:17 So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

2:18 I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me.

2:19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless.

2:20 So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun.

2:21 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. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune.

2:22 What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?

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2:24 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,

2:25 for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

2:26 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. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

QUESTIONS:

1. Read Ecclesiastes 2:12-26 and in your own words pull out the main thought of this passage.

2. To what does Solomon turn his thoughts, according to verse 12?

3. What did Solomon observe, according to verse 13?

4. What did Solomon realize, according to verses 14 & 15?

5. In what three ways are the wise men and fool alike, according to verse 16?

6. Why did Solomon hate all things, according to verse 18?

7. What is a great misfortune, according to Solomon in verse 21?

8. What is the best things that a man can do, according to verse 24?

9. What verse in the study has meant the most to you?

10. What lesson have you learned from this study?

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: “Nine-tenths of our unhappiness is selfishness and is an insult cast in the face of God”

LESSON #2: A man shows what he is by what he does with what he has.

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