

Sermon Topic: Wisdom, Work and Pleasure by Rev David Ho, 19 Aug 2018**Sermon Text: Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26**

¹² I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! 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 crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. ¹⁶ I said to myself, "Look, I have 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.

² I said to myself, "Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good." But that also proved to be meaningless. ³ "Laughter," I said, "is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?" ⁴ I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives. ⁵ I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. ⁶ I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. ⁷ I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. ⁸ 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. ⁹ I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man's heart. ¹⁰ I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. ¹¹ I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. ¹² Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun. ¹³ 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? ¹⁴ I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. ¹⁵ The wise have eyes in their heads, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. ¹⁶ Then I said to myself, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said to myself, "This too is meaningless." ¹⁷ For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die!

¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. ²⁰ And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. ²¹ So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. ²² For a person may labor with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. ²³ What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? ²⁴ All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless. ²⁵ A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁶ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? ²⁷ To the person 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.

Introduction

The Teacher, a 'Son of David' refers to King Solomon. What were Solomon's qualifications?

- God-given wisdom (2 Chr 1:7-12; 1 Kings 4:29-34)
- Experience (1:12, 1 Kings 11:3)
- Resources (2 Chr 9:13-14) to be able to research and experiment
- Time at his disposal (2 Chr 9:22-24)

What were his observations of life?

- 'Under the sun' is mentioned 27 times
- 'Under heaven' is mentioned 3 times
- 'On earth' is mentioned 7 times

In his observations he saw 3 aspects of life:

- Wisdom – the pursuit of education and equipping
- Work – the pursuit of enrichment and enterprise (employment)
- Leisure – the pursuit of entertainment and enjoyment

Does Education Provide Meaning? (2:15)

The teacher lists 3 frustrations:

- He found more questions than answers (1:15,18)
- He will die just like the fool (2:14-15)
- He will be forgotten anyway (2:16)

Conclusion: Be wise anyway! (2:13-14)

Does Work Provide Meaning? (2:4-11; 17-18, 22)

The teacher lists 5 frustrations:

- He cannot bring along what he has with him when he dies (2:18)
- He has to leave it to someone who did not work for it (2:21)
- The person who takes over may squander it (2:19)
- Achievement springs from man's envy of his neighbour (4:4)
- Work was full of worry, pain and grief (2:23)

Conclusion: Work hard anyway! (2:10, 24)

Does Pleasure Provide Meaning? (2:1)

What were his pleasures?

- He tried amusement (2:2)
- He tried alcohol, drugs probably (2:3)
- He tried sex (2:8)

What are your pleasures? Eating and drinking? Shopping? Movies? Holidaying? Computer Games?

Conclusion: Enjoy anyway! (2:24-25)

Final Conclusion?

Eccl 1:2 - "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." We move from the Futility of Education to the Drudgery of Work to the Boredom of Pleasure! Be wise anyway! Work hard anyway! Enjoy anyway!

What does Jesus have to say?

- Be on guard against all kinds of greed. Life does not consist in an abundance of possessions! ¹⁵Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." ¹⁶And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. ¹⁷He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' ¹⁸"Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. ¹⁹And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." (Lk 12:15 -19)
- There is surely more than just life under the sun! ²⁰"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?' (Lk 12:20)
- God will hold us accountable with how we use our material blessings. ²¹"This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." (Lk 12:21)
- Are we choosing the world over our souls? ³⁶What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? ³⁷Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? (Mark 8:36-37)

Final Conclusion:

Study → Success → Pleasure?

Study → Success → **Significance (ref. John 3:16 - I know who I belong to, where I came from, and where I am going)**