

Ecclesiastes

Chapter 2

Ch2: We have a desperate search for meaning in pleasures.

Ask: What are some things people spend their time searching for? (fame, fortune, popularity, possessions, accomplishments, relationships, etc.)

Recall from Ecc 1:9-10 There is nothing new under the sun.

As we read through Ch 2, ask yourself, “Where is God in this?”

Read 2:1-11 (p553) [Slides 14-17] ¹ I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.” But behold, this also was vanity. ² I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?” ³ I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. ⁴ I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. ⁵ I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. ⁶ I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. ⁷ I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. ⁸ I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

⁹ So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. ¹⁰ And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil. ¹¹ Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

Verse 1 starts with “I thought in my heart.” That’s the same cognitive/emotive parallel we saw in Chapter 1. We’ll see it again in verse 15.

Prov 14:13 (p537) [Slide 18] Even in laughter the heart may ache, and the end of joy may be grief.

Laughter is great, but a life built on laughter is a joke.

[Slide 19] 2:3 “My heart still guiding me with wisdom” The Preacher did not drink so much wine that he lost his ability to think clearly.

How to lay hold on folly. In Proverbs 9, we can see each one personified separately. They are effectively opposites. [Slide 20][Slide 21]

- 1 Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn her seven pillars.
- 2 She has slaughtered her beasts; she has mixed her wine;
she has also set her table.
- 3 She has sent out her young women to call
from the highest places in the town,
- 4a “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”

- 13 The woman Folly is loud;
she is seductive and knows nothing.
- 14 She sits at the door of her house;
she takes a seat on the highest places of the town,
- 15 calling to those who pass by,
who are going straight on their way,
- 16 “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!”

This chapter shows two competing invitations, one from Wisdom, one from Folly.

Both are portrayed as women calling people to enter their houses.

Wisdom invites the simple to eat of her life-giving food (vv. 1–12).

Folly offers food that leads to death (vv. 13–18).

v.14 Folly counterfeits the actions of wisdom so as to appear wise (cf. v. 3).

2:4 In the tradition of great kings, he undertook great projects.

Verse 8: concubines / harem. This is the only place in the bible that this word is used.

[Slide 22] Verse 9: “So I became great” – fame; striven for then just as now.

In this section: laughter, wine, folly, works, houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, fruit trees, pools, slaves, herds and flocks, silver and gold, singers, concubines, wives.

From an external viewpoint, seeing someone with those achievements might cause us to remark, “Wow – he is successful.” But is he?

He’s climbed the ladder of success, but it’s leaning on the wrong wall.

There is not an innate meaning in any of these things, some more important than others, but all are fleeting. They are not sinful in themselves.

Pleasure itself cannot give satisfaction or meaning.

All of these failed to bring lasting satisfaction to the teacher, **yet people nearly three thousand years later are still trying them in search of enduring fulfillment.** “There is nothing new under the sun.”

Read Ecc 2:12-17 [Slides 23-24] ¹² So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done. ¹³ Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness. ¹⁴ The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. ¹⁵ Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. ¹⁶ For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool! ¹⁷ So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.

V12: ‘Comes after’ = succeeds

2:12-13 madness, folly. If he could not find life’s purpose in the highest forms of wisdom, he would consider the other extremes—folly and even insanity.

He sees the value of wisdom over folly; but there's a catch...¹⁶ "For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!"

Trying to find meaning in these vanities are like chasing after the wind; trying to grab hold of smoke. Why bother??

If that's not enough, now he says he "hated life" (v17). And he feels the same about toil in the next section...

It's important to note he doesn't hate life – (observe that it is past tense), he is stating a temporary conclusion of his testing of wisdom and folly.

Read Ecc 2:18-23 [Slides 25-26] ¹⁸ I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, ¹⁹ and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity. ²⁰ So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, ²¹ because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. ²² What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? ²³ For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.

Part of the futility of trying to find fulfillment in material accomplishment is the fact that one must leave the fruit of his work to another.

A Jewish proverb says, "There are no pockets in shrouds."

[Slide 27] This thought is reflected also in Psalm 49:10 (p473), For he sees that even the wise die; the fool and the stupid alike must perish and leave their wealth to others.

Whether that person is wise or foolish could impact how lasting your accomplishment is. That person becomes the master of your previous accomplishments.

[Slide 28] Ps 39:6 (p468) Surely a man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nothing they are in turmoil; man heaps up wealth and does not know who will gather!

Will your legacy live on through your accomplishments?

The teacher recognizes that death brings both foolishness and wisdom to an end, and that death made everything in life insignificant.

Explanation comes in 2:24-26.

[Slide 29] Read Ecc 2:24-26 ²⁴ There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? ²⁶ For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.

Enjoy what God has given us. That's why he gave it to us. Accept them with gratitude. But they are not the end in themselves.

'enjoyment' in v. 24 literally, "and make his soul see good".

Verse 24 acknowledges God as our Provider and Sustainer. This is the first of many "carpe diem" passages.

"From the hand of God" ...God provides the food and drink, provides the toil (and our ability to perform it).

It's important to note that the teacher is not advocating 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die,' but rather "Thank God for what you have, and enjoy it to the glory of God.

[Slide 30] Discuss: How does this square up with 1 John 2:15? (p1021) Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

[Slide 31] I am confident that the teacher would have completely agreed with what John stated next: ¹⁶ For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and

the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. ¹⁷ And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Enjoyment in our toil is possible. “**find** enjoyment”: we might have to look for it; or we might have a job/career we really like.

Workaholic: a difference between conscientious and obsessed. As a workaholic, would we find enjoyment in our toil? Is there a point in it - given the brevity of any fame, recognition or benefit? We need to have a balance.

[Slide 32] Lk 12:20 (p871) But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

There is nothing wrong with enjoying what God has provided. The true meaning of life, though, is not in what is provided, but in God himself.

[Slide 33] Col 3:17 (p984) And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Col 3:23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,

God’s sovereignty can bring comfort and meaning to our lives.

Ps 112:6 (p 509) For the righteous will never be moved; he will be remembered forever.