

## Joy in the Mist - *Eccles 2:12-26*

**Introduction** – Do you remember (maybe as a child, maybe not) running around in the midst of a thick fog, trying to touch the fog? You can't see anywhere through the fog, but everywhere you turn or run it is just out of your reach. It surrounds you and yet evades you. This is the vanity, the vapor of life under the sun.

**Review** – We are coming to the end of the first main division of the book and so let us not forget the broader argument. Solomon is arguing that apart from the gift of God, there is no joy or satisfaction to be found in life. This is because all of life is vanity, a vapor, an inscrutable repetition (1:2). This inscrutable repetition can be found in nature and even in our own life-cycles (1:3-11). With all that this world can provide, Solomon sought after wisdom, folly, and pleasure all the way to the end and yet only found the same mist there (1:12-2:11). At this point, Solomon looks back over his journey with wisdom, finding nothing but mist, and yet receives the gift of God (2:12-26).

**The Same Destination** (vv12-17) – Death comes to everyone. The pursuit of wisdom or folly doesn't lead to different places under the sun. Consuming every known pleasure or producing every possible widget still ends in one's demise. Solomon reminds us (v12) that he was in a place, better than anyone else, to really pursue these things all the way to the end.

**Wisdom is Better** – Wisdom is better than folly (vv13-14a) but this is only a statement of faith. Outside of the Word of God we cannot know this. Elsewhere, Solomon teaches of the advantage of wisdom (i.e. Prov 16:16-17, 14:16, 21:20-22) but this same man understands that under the sun, the wise man and the fool share the same fate (14b). Like two men standing on the beach as a tsunami approaches, death awaits them both.

**But Why?** – Welcome to the world's Department of Philosophy. There is a reason for life, there is a reason for pursuing wisdom, it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. However, we cannot know why this is true apart from the Word of God – it is a mist (v15). And banking on leaving a name for yourself doesn't do much good (v16); who will remember you?

**I Hated Life** (v17) – This too is a statement from wisdom; this is not a statement of ultimate despair at all. The word "hate" here includes the idea of contempt or disdain. Solomon refuses to accept petty lies about comfort in the face of death under the sun. "*People develop idolatrous expectations of life by ignoring or discounting death. Death is an inescapable message from God, and it is not good news*" – Meyers. Solomon is not cursing God, but despairing of any ultimate meaning in the mist, not unlike Job where he curses his life but not his God (see also Jeremiah 20:7-18). The saints of God are even encouraged to dwell upon these ideas in our worship (Ps 49:10, 16-17).

**Pushing Us Towards God** – Like these men, and like the psalm mentioned, the purpose of this is to press us to God, not towards any other ultimate answer. Jesus said that He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. And Paul, understanding all of this, is able to say while in prison, "*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*" (Phil 1:21).

**And If That's Not Bad Enough** (vv18-23) – Not only will we be forgotten. All that we leave behind is doomed to this vapor as well. God ordained frustration for man's work and all that he leaves behind (Gen 3:17-19). Except for the promises of God for us and for our children, this is even true for the Christian. This lack of control from within ourselves leads a man to "despair" (20), "sorrow" (23), "burdens" (v23), and "restlessness" (v23). Welcome to the state of our 24/7, panic-stricken, scared of the future, self-absorbed, despair-driven culture.

**The Conclusion of the Matter** (vv24-26) – Recall my edited translation - "*There is not a good in man that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, apart from Him?*" (24-25). There is nothing in man, not his wisdom nor his pursuits, by which he can find ultimate meaning or enjoyment apart from the gift of God; and God wants it that way.

**For God Gives** (v26) – Rest here in these three words. What does He give? Wisdom, knowledge, and joy. And He does so in the work and in the enjoyment of the harvest. But it is His gift, not our work. There is a promise here for those in Christ as well. On the one hand, we don't know what will come of our heritage (v21). And yet we know this: he who is in rebellion to God is simply building up things for the godly so one day it would be given to the people of God. Jesus said, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" He did not say they would inherit heaven, which is true, but the earth. Abraham was promised that he would inherit the world – the entire world (Rom 4:13). This is all grace. This is all the gift of God. This is joy in the mist.