

## Solomon's Quest – Eccles 1:12 – 2:11

**Introduction** – What happens when someone tells you they have some very important news, or some juicy information about some situation, but they can't tell you right now? “*All is vapor*,” we might be told about life under the sun, but our tendency is to wander through the labyrinth looking for the answer. While we saw that nature teaches us about this inscrutable repetition (1:2-11), Solomon tells us of his own quest for meaning and the folly of such investigating. What if you had all the time, all the money, all the servants and skilled workers, every possible opportunity of life at your fingertips...what would you do? Would you be able to find the good life?

**With Eyes Wide Open** (1:12-18) – The frustration caused by the fact that all that happens and all that we do is fleeting and vaporous is supposed to make us turn to God, the only Place and Person where all of life matters and has meaning. Solomon gives testimony and a confession to falling to the temptation to seek satisfaction and meaning here, “*under the sun*.” He set his “*heart to seek and search out by wisdom*,” (v13), he “*communed with his heart*,” (v16), and he set his heart “*to know wisdom and to know madness and folly*” (v17). He did not walk into darkness ignorantly, but rather with his eyes wide open.

**That Which is Crooked** (v13-15) – There is something crooked about this world around us; nothing adds us “*under the sun*.” And this is not a flaw in the system; God made it this way (see 7:13). This is the “*burdensome task God has given to the sons of Adam*” certainly referring to the result and curse of the fall (Gen 3:17). The purpose of God includes the fact that sinners cannot figure out the meaning of life and cannot leverage any experience towards ultimate wisdom.

**“And what is lacking cannot be numbered”** (15b-18) – Solomon laments over the fact that while he had been granted more wisdom than any man (v16), this wisdom only reveals that there is so much we don't know and that we are trapped in a “*grasping for the wind*” (v14, 17). Whatever the secret things of God amount to, we cannot know them nor how voluminous they are because we do not know them. On the other hand, to throw up one's hands in forfeit and pursuing madness and folly (i.e. life is nothing but chaos, or chance, or postmodern meta-narrative) is also grasping for wind. Within these boundaries, “*in much wisdom is much grief*...” (v18).

**The Quest for the Good Life (*apart from the blessing and gift of God*)** (2:1-11) – Solomon heads down the labyrinth of looking for meaning and satisfaction, that rest for one's soul, in this thing and then in that thing, finding only one dead-end after another. Like scratching a mosquito-bite, nothing really satisfies the itch.

**Mirth** (vv1-2) – Comedy, laughter, a good joke. When life is only about making it to Friday, to the next party, the next laugh, the next good-time, it all becomes empty. Make life nothing more than another amusement to pursue, and Monday morning still comes...

**Wine** (v3) – Perhaps a bottle of wine (or two) might do the trick. This pursuit most likely included all forms of feasting as well (1 Kings 4:22-23). As with all of these pleasures, wine is a gift, but when it becomes master, it is as empty as the bottle the next morning.

**Accomplishments** (vv4-7) – If satisfaction cannot come through consumption, then maybe through productivity. Solomon's temple, vineyards, global travels, monuments, and accomplishments made him the superhero of the day. But try as we might, they crack and peel, breakdown and fall apart. When the apostles were with Jesus marveling at Herod's temple, Jesus told them that in less than a generation it would be left in complete rubble (Matt 24). Go ahead, Solomon says, build your stupid little kingdom.

**Aesthetics** (v8) – Solomon acquired the most beautiful art pieces of silver and gold. He brought in the best musicians and the finest musical technology of his day. He pursued true beauty and innovation. But then, like always happens, the show is over, the music stops, the concert is overcome with silence and emptiness; nothing has changed.

**Every Sensual Pleasure** (v9-10) – Solomon had every opportunity that money and fame could buy. He had every opportunity that learning, that lawlessness, that skill, that amusement could bring. He confesses that he tried it all. “*If it felt good, he did it...He had a thousand women...and all of them good looking. He had more money than a man can spend. He had vast estates. He had time to pursue every possible kick in every possible corner of his palaces*...” – Wilson.

**Desperate Emptiness** (v11) – And then he looked – and it was all a bunch of nothing, emptiness, grasping for the wind. There was no profit, and by that he means there was no attaining true meaning, satisfaction, rest; there was nothing to leverage at God. Nothing. Vapor. And what eyes of faith see in this is Good News.

**This Road Has Been Traveled Before** – What does our world, our culture, and possibly our own individual lives, need to glean from this? Find the rich man, the man who has built the most, the man who indulges the most, the man who works the hardest, the man who gives himself everything, the man who denies himself everything, the man who knows more than anyone – and what do you most often find? Misery. Emptiness. Meaninglessness.

**Do You Have to Go There Too?** – Everyone is tempted to, in one way or another, at one time or another. Pack it up, deny God's complete sovereignty and the vapor of life and try to find on your own the real meaning, the real pleasure, the real satisfaction. But you don't have to. Teenagers do not have to rebel. Young men do not have to sow their wild oats. You don't have to have a colorful testimony to know that Jesus is Life and Truth and Goodness and Beauty. You only need faith. Listen to Jesus – Matt 11:28-30.

**Stop Doing the Hokey Pokey** – As members of the covenant, we still have the temptations around us to put our left foot in and put our left foot out. What happens with covenant kids in high school and college? What happens with a man who receives an enormous inheritance or place of prestige and power? What happens to a woman who grows discontent with an ordinary day at home? A pursuit of wisdom, wine, laughter, success and fame, rock'n'roll, and even a pursuit of nothingness – all is vanity and grasping for the wind. Do not pursue pleasure like a pagan – you will never find that satisfaction your soul longs for. Never.

Drh – January 20, 2008

## Notes for Little Saints

### Solomon's Quest – *Eccles 1:12 – 2:11*

There are two ways to find true happiness in life. That is what the Bible teaches. There is the right way and the wrong way.

*Once upon a time a little boy, a son of David, that is, a boy who was a covenant member in the church, had a dream. In that dream, he was like Solomon, another son of David. He had the opportunity to pursue anything and everything he wanted to in order to find happiness. So, in his dream (it was only a dream), he was able to become all of these things -*

*He became the smartest boy in the world -*

*He became the funniest boy in the world -*

*He ate and drank his favorite foods all the time; all he could he eat until he was stuffed -*

*He got the biggest bike, the largest stuffed animal, and the fastest computer game -*

*He got his own iPod and listened to all the music he wanted to all the time -*

*He did whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted -*

*And then, in his dream, he heard another Son of David, Solomon, speaking to him - and he said these words -*

*But you'll have to find those words and write them out for yourself -*

*Ecclesiastes 2:11*

*In his dream (it was only a dream), another Son of David, then came to him, because he was crying in his dream (it was only a dream). This Son of David said something else to him, something so much more important - and it stopped all the sorrow.*

*But you'll have to find those words and write them out for yourself as well -*

*Matthew 11:28-30*