

Chasing after the Wind

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Ecclesiastes 2.12-26 | March 19, 2017

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I. Introduction to this Study

We continue our Lenten series in the book of Ecclesiastes called Chasing After the Wind, a common refrain throughout the book describing the futility of running after worldly things.

This week, we're chasing after the wind of wealth.

II. Connecting with One Another

In our culture, one of the first things someone asks when they meet a new person is "What do you do for a living?"

Why do you think this is? What is it about work that seems to define who we are?

What does it say about our culture that this is the first thing we ask?

III. Study the Text

- a. Before engaging the text, spend some time reflecting on the two previous weeks, where we addressed the futility of wisdom and pleasure. What struck you in those studies and/or sermons? (To recap, turn to Ecclesiastes 1.12-18 and 2.1-11)

How has recognizing the futility of wisdom and pleasure prompted you to chase after the disciplines of solitude and fasting?

- b. Read Ecclesiastes 2.12-16.

The Teacher briefly returns to wisdom and folly, though his purview is now wider than his own experience. His rhetorical question in the second half of verse 12 ("What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done?") foreshadows what he'll write below. One author puts it this way: "If the king cannot achieve something of enduring value, then no one who comes after him can."

How you ever felt this way? When? Why?

What does this type of thinking imply about Solomon's state of mind? Is he being prideful about his own importance?

- c. Read Ecclesiastes 2.17-18.

While ancient Hebrew sages often compared wisdom to the tree of life, for Solomon that tree has withered and died. What's more, as he realizes his own mortality, the Teacher realizes his desire for remembrance. Brown writes, "Like the

builders of Babel, Solomon wanted to establish his name for all generations through his innumerable accomplishments.”

What accomplishments have you worked for? What would you like to be remembered for? Why are these things important to you?

- d. In ancient cultures like Israel, reputation, property, and possessions were inextricably linked to one’s familial identity (see, for instance, the story of Naboth’s vineyard in 1st Kings 21.1-16). As such, reputation, property, and possessions were passed down for many generations.

How is our culture similar or different from ancient Israel?

- e. Reread Ecclesiastes 2.17-18, then continue on through verse 23.

What does Solomon think about leaving his reputation, property, and possessions to future generations? Why?

Philip Ryken summarizes Solomon’s thought: “One person does the work, but another person gets the wealth. It’s just not fair! Rather than working for our own profit, we end up working for the slacker who gets our stuff when we die.”

Do you agree with him? Why or why not?

What’s the most important thing you want to pass on to others? What steps have you taken to do so?

While Solomon may not have known whether his successor would be wise, we do: Rehoboam was so foolish that he lost over 80% of his father’s kingdom (see 1st Kings 12).

- f. Woody Allen once joked, “I don’t want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it by not dying.” Leo Tolstoy was more serious: “My question... was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man... It was: ‘What will come of what I am doing today or tomorrow? What will come of my whole life? Why should I live, why wish for anything, or do anything?’ It can also be expressed thus: Is there any meaning in my life that the inevitable death awaiting me does not destroy?”

Imagine you’re asked this question in a Bible Study you’re leading. How would you respond? What Scriptures or biblical truths would you point the questioner to?

- g. Read Ecclesiastes 2.24-25.

This is only the second time the writer has mentioned God (the first was in 1.13: “What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind!”).

How does Solomon answer Woody Allen and Leo Tolstoy’s questions above?

What do you make of these two brief optimistic verses?

- h. Read Ecclesiastes 1.17, 2.11, and 2.17, then Ecclesiastes 2.26.

What changes Solomon’s outlook in 2.26? (Discuss this before continuing)

Philip Ryken writes, "God's presence makes all the difference. No one can ever find any true joy in anything apart from Him. So, if we are having trouble finding enjoyment in life, God must not be at the center of things for us. If we are deeply dissatisfied, this could be the reason: we have been taking good things and making them ultimate things, when in fact they are God-given things."

How do you keep God "at the center of things" in your life?

- i. Read Matthew 6.19-34.

Which of the things Jesus mentions do you find yourself running after?

How could you instead "Seek first God's kingdom and righteousness," trusting that "all these things will be given to you as well"?

- j. Time permitting, spend time reading and reflecting on what these passages engage the futility of chasing after wealth:

Matthew 13.1-23

Mark 10.13-31

1st Timothy 6.17-19

James 5.1-6

Revelation 3.14-22

IV. Pray

- a. Lift up those you know who chase after things which "moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal," that God would beckon them to instead trust in Him,
- b. Pray for yourself, your family, and the Christians you know to be a positive example of living simply, and trusting God for His provisions,
- c. Ask God to prepare the way for our high school students as they travel to Mexico over Spring break.