

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

Commentary Outline

The name of this book signifies "**The Preacher**." The wisdom of God here preaches to us, speaking by Solomon, the author. At the close of his life, becoming sensible of his sin and folly, he recorded here his experience for the benefit of others.

In this book of his repentance, Solomon pronounced all earthly good to be "**vanity and vexation of spirit**."

- It proclaims vanity of the world, and that it cannot make us happy.
- It signifies the vileness of sin, and its certain tendency to make us miserable.
- It shows that no created good can satisfy the soul, and that
- happiness is to be found in God alone.
- This doctrine, under the blessed Spirit's teaching, leads the heart to Christ Jesus.

VANITY OF VANITIES, ALL IS VANITY

This is the context of the preacher's sermon, of which in this book he never loses sight. If this world, in its present state, were all, it would not be worth living for; and the wealth and pleasure of this world, if we had ever so much, are not enough to make us happy. He does not merely say all things are vain, but that they are vanity.

Ecclesiastes 1

- Solomon shows that all human things are vain (1-3)
- Man's toil and want of satisfaction (4-8)
- There is nothing new (9-11)
- The vexation in pursuit of knowledge (12-18)

Much is to be learned by comparing one part of Scripture with another. We here behold Solomon returning from the broken and empty cisterns of the world, to the Fountain of living water; recording his own folly and shame, the bitterness of his disappointment, and the lessons he had learned. Those that have taken warning to turn and live, should warn others not to go on and die.

What profit has a man of all his labour? All he gets by it will not supply the wants of the soul, nor satisfy its desires; will not atone for the sins of the soul, nor hinder the loss of it: what profit will the wealth of the world be to the soul in death, in judgment, or in the everlasting state?

Ecclesiastes 2

- The vanity and vexation of mirth, sensual pleasure, riches, and pomp (1-11)
- Human wisdom insufficient (12-17)
- This world to be used according to the will of God (18-26)

Solomon soon found mirth and pleasure to be vanity. How does noisy, flashy mirth make a man happy? The manifold devices of men's hearts, to get satisfaction from the world, and their changing from one thing to another, are like the restlessness of a man in a fever. Perceiving it was folly to give himself to wine, he next tried the costly amusements of princes.

The poor, when they read such a description, are ready to feel discontent. But the remedy against all such feelings is in the estimate of it all by the owner himself. All was vanity and vexation of spirit: and the same things would yield the same result to us, as to Solomon.

Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. His wisdom remained with him; a strong understanding, with great human knowledge. But every earthly pleasure, when unconnected with better blessings, leaves the mind as eager and unsatisfied as before. Happiness arises not from the situation in which we are placed. It is only through Jesus Christ that final blessedness can be attained.

Ecclesiastes 3

- The changes of human affairs (1-10)
- The Divine counsels unchangeable (11-15)
- The vanity of worldly power (16-22)

To expect unchanging happiness in a changing world, must end in disappointment. To bring ourselves to our state in life, is our duty and wisdom in this world. God's whole plan for the government of the world will be found altogether wise, just, and good.

Let us then, seize the favorable opportunity for every good purpose and work. This is given us, that we may always have something to do. None were sent into the world to be idle.

Ecclesiastes 4

- Miseries from oppression (1-3)
- Troubles from envy (4-6)
- The folly of covetousness (7-8)
- The advantages of mutual assistance (9-12)
- The changes of royalty (13-16)

It grieved Solomon to see might prevail against right. Wherever we turn, we see melancholy proofs of the wickedness and misery of mankind, who try to create trouble to themselves and to each other. Being thus hardly used, men are tempted to hate and despise life.

But a good man, though badly off while in this world, cannot have cause to wish he had never been born, since he is glorifying the Lord, even in the fires, and will be happy at last, for ever happy.

Ungodly men have most cause to wish the continuance of life with all its vexations, as a far more miserable condition awaits them if they die in their sins. If human and worldly things were our chief good, not to exist would be preferable to life, considering the various oppressions here below.

Ecclesiastes 5

- What renders devotion vain (1-3)
- Of vows, and oppression (4-8)
- The vanity of riches shown (9-12)
- The right use of riches (13-17)

Address thyself to the worship of God, and take time to compose thyself for it. Keep thy thoughts from roving and wandering: keep thy affections from running out toward wrong objects. Avoid vain repetitions; copious prayers are not here condemned, but those that are unmeaning.

How often our wandering thoughts render attendance on Divine ordinances little better than the sacrifice of fools! Many words and hasty ones, used in prayer, show folly in the heart, low thoughts of God, and careless thoughts of our own souls.

Ecclesiastes 6

- The vanity of riches. Also of long life and flourishing families (1-6)
- The little advantage any one has in outward things (7-12)

A man often has all he needs for outward enjoyment; yet the Lord leaves him so to covetousness or evil dispositions, that he makes no good or comfortable use of what he has. By one means or other his possessions come to strangers; this is vanity, and an evil disease.

A numerous family was a matter of fond desire and of high honor among the Hebrews; and long life is the desire of mankind in general. Even with these additions a man may not be able to enjoy his riches, family, and life. Such a man, in his passage through life, seems to have been born for no end or use. And he who has entered on life only for one moment, to quit it the next, has a preferable lot to him who has lived long, but only to suffer.

Ecclesiastes 7

- The benefit of a good name; of death above life; of sorrow above vain mirth (1-6)
- Concerning oppression, anger, and discontent (7-10)
- Advantages of wisdom (11-22)
- Experience of the evil of sin (23-29)

Reputation for piety and honesty is more desirable than all the wealth and pleasure in this world. It will do more good to go to a funeral than to a feast. We may lawfully go to both, as there is occasion; our Savior both feasted at the wedding of his friend in Cana, and wept at the grave of his friend in Bethany.

Considering how apt we are to be vain and indulge the flesh, it is best to go to the house of mourning, to learn the end of man as to this world. Seriousness is better than mirth and jollity. That is best for us which is best for our souls, though it be unpleasing to sense.

It is better to have our corruptions mortified by the rebuke of the wise, than to have them gratified by the song of fools. The laughter of a fool is soon gone, the end of his mirth is heaviness.

Ecclesiastes 8

- Commendations of wisdom (1-5)
- To prepare for sudden evils and death (6-8)
- It shall be well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked (9-13)
- Mysteries of Providence (14-17)

None of the rich, the powerful, the honorable, or the accomplished of the sons of men, are so excellent, useful, or happy, as the wise man. Who else can interpret the words of God, or teach aright from his truths and dispensations? What madness must it be for weak and dependent creatures to rebel against the Almighty! What numbers form wrong judgments, and bring misery on themselves, in this life and that to come!

Ecclesiastes 9

- Good and bad men fare alike as to this world (1-3)
- All men must die, Their portion as to this life (4-10)
- Disappointments common (11-12)
- Benefits of wisdom (13-18)

We are not to think our searching into the word or works of God useless, because we cannot explain all difficulties. We may learn many things good for ourselves and useful to others. But man cannot always decide who are objects of God's special love, or under his wrath; and God will certainly put a difference between the precious and the vile, in the other world.

The difference as to present happiness, arises from the inward supports and consolations the righteous enjoy, and the benefit they derive from varied trials and mercies. As far as the sons of men are left to themselves, their hearts are full of evil. And prosperity in sin, causes them even to set God at defiance by daring wickedness. Though, on this side death, the righteous and the wicked may often seem to fare alike, on the other side there will be a vast difference between them.

Ecclesiastes 10

- To preserve a character for wisdom (1-3)
- Respecting subjects and rulers (4-10)
- Of foolish talk (11-15)
- Duties of rulers and subjects (16-20)

Those especially who make a profession of religion, should keep from all appearances of evil. A wise man has great advantage over a fool, who is always at a loss when he has anything to do. Sin is the reproach of sinners, wherever they go, and shows their folly.

Ecclesiastes 11

- Exhortation to liberality (1-6)
- An admonition to prepare for death, and to young persons to be religious (7-10)

Solomon presses the rich to do good to others. Give freely, though it may seem thrown away and lost. Give to many. Excuse not thyself with the good thou hast done, from the good thou hast further to do. It is not lost, but well laid out.

We have reason to expect evil, for we are born to trouble; it is wisdom to do good in the day of prosperity. Riches cannot profit us, if we do not benefit others. Every man must labor to be a blessing to that place where the providence of God casts him. Wherever we are, we may find good work to do, if we have but hearts to do it. If we magnify every little difficulty, start objections, and fancy hardships, we shall never go on, much less go through with our work.

Winds and clouds of tribulation are, in God's hands, designed to try us. Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season, in God's time, you shall reap.

Source: Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary
