

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

(Book of the world's vanities)

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The Book of Ecclesiastes is the second book of Solomon the Wise, and is the second step in our spiritual way. The word Ecclesiastes means 'gathering together'. This term can be applied to King Solomon, for he was a king, a prophet, a philosopher and a preacher. He had various experiences in life - he sinned and deviated from the Lord, he worshipped idols, and then he repented and returned to the Lord once more.

"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 'Vanity of vanities' says the Preacher; 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'" (1:1-2).

In this Book, we find out how Solomon, through the mercy of God, came to the conclusion that all is vanity: "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13). The name Solomon is derived from the word 'peace', (the Hebrew word 'Shalom', and the Arabic word 'Salam'), and this is how we come to call our beloved Lord Jesus Christ the 'King of Peace'. Therefore, King Solomon was a symbol of Christ.

There are seven main topics in the Book of Ecclesiastes :-

VANITY - this is the key word in the Book.

"I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and indeed all is vanity and grasping for the wind" (1:14) - relates to the vanity of all the work done and achieved in this world.

"I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure', but surely, this also was vanity" (2:1) - relates to the vanity of the pleasures of this world.

"Then I looked on all the works my hands had done, and on the labour in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" (2:11) - relates to the vanity of labouring in this world.

"So I said in my heart, 'As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?' Then I said in my heart, 'This also is vanity'" (2:15) - relates to the vanity of human wisdom.

"Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind" (2:17) - relates to the vanity of achievement.

"And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labour in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity" (2:19) - relates to the vanity of position.

"For all his days are sorrowful and his work grievous; even in the night his heart takes no rest" (2:23) - relates to the vanity of ambitions.

"For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind" (2:26) - relates to the vanity of gathering and collecting.

"There is an evil I have seen under the sun and it is common among men: a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This is vanity and an evil affliction" (6:1-2) - relates to the vanity of riches.

"Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind" (6:9) - relates to the vanity of senses and desires.

It is important to first come to the realisation that this world is vanity because in the end, all will vanish.

TIME & ETERNITY

"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under the sun..." (3:1-11)

Without eternity we could not understand the meaning of this life. Eternity sheds light on the

things around us. All is vanity because eternity exists. That is why it is not good to concentrate on physical, materialistic things, but to concentrate on the metaphysical. If you put eternity inside your heart and live according to this eternal feeling inside you and eternal life dwelling inside you, you are going to see eternity, work for eternity, and behave accordingly.

"A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth" (7:1). The righteous man is always confident in death.

"...and desire fails. For man goes to his eternal home" (12:5).

ENDLESS DESIRES

"All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full...the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" (1:7-8). We will never find satisfaction in limited things, as a Christian philosopher once said, 'The human being is a well of desires'. The only way to fill this well and to quench our endless thirst is to possess within us the Infinite Person, who is our beloved Lord Jesus Christ.

"He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance with increase. This also is vanity" (5:10).

"All the labour of man is for his mouth; and yet the soul is not satisfied" (6:7)

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

"That which has been will always be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun" (1:9-10). Whether it is the New Age movement (which is actually based on ancient eastern religion), or homosexuality or atomic bombs, nothing is new, for newness is not in essence, but in superficial form. Man is the same, Satan is the same, sin is the same, and Christ is the same.

EXTREMISM

"Do not be overly righteous nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourselves?" (7:16). We should be moderate in all things, because if, for example, you exaggerate in religion, it can lead to pride, and thereby harm you instead of doing you good.

YOUTH

"Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them' (referring to old age): While the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are not darkened ('darkened' due to poor eye sight), and the clouds do not return after the rain; in the day when the keepers of the house tremble (referring to the fragilities of old age), and the strong men bow down; when the grinders cease because they are few (grinders being the teeth), ...and desires fails. For man goes to his eternal home, and the mourners go about the streets (people are mourning the old person's death)" (12:1-5).

FULLNESS AND DUTY OF HUMANITY

So now...

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgement, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil" (12:13-14).

We must be righteous, we must be religious, we must be spiritual.