**The Futility of Pleasure and Possessions** (Ecclesiastes 2)

1 I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure *and* gratification [Solomon is testing himself]; so enjoy yourself *and* have a good time.” But behold, this too was vanity (futility, meaninglessness). 2 I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” 3 I explored with my mind how to gratify myself with wine while [at the same time] having my mind remain steady *and* guide me wisely; and how to take control of foolishness, until I could see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. 4 I made great works: I built houses for myself; I planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made gardens and orchards for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6 I made pools of water for myself from which to water the forest *and* make the trees bud. 7 I bought male and female slaves and had slaves born in my house. I also possessed herds and flocks larger than any who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male singers and female singers, and the delights *and* pleasures of men—many concubines.

9 So I became great and excelled more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also remained with me. 10 Whatever my eyes looked at with desire I did not refuse them. I did not withhold from my heart any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor; and this was my reward for all my labor. 11 Then I considered all which my hands had done and labored to do, and behold, all was vanity and chasing after the wind and there was no profit (nothing of lasting value) under the sun.

**I. The Futility of Pleasure and Accomplishments (Verses 1-11)**

* Verses 1-2: Pleasure (worldly); the author finds laughter and pleasure to be meaningless.
* Verses 3-6: Pursuit of pleasure through wine, great works, building projects, gardens, and parks.
* Verses 7-8: Accumulation of wealth, possessions, servants, and entertainment.
* Verses 9-10: Achievement of greatness and indulgence in all desires.
* Verse 11: Realization that all these pursuits are meaningless, a chasing after the wind, with no lasting gain.

**Wisdom Excels Folly**

12 So I turned to consider [worldly] wisdom, madness, and folly; for what will the man do who succeeds the king? Nothing *except* what has already been done. 13 Then I saw that wisdom [sometimes includes sorrow in truth] is better than [the pleasures of] folly *and* self-indulgence as light excels darkness. 14 The wise man’s eyes are in his head [foresight, perceptive, clear visioned], but the fool walks in darkness [ignorant and stupid]; and yet I know that [in the end] one fate happens to them both. 15 Then I said to myself, “As it happens to the fool, so death will also happen to me. What use is it then for me to be extremely wise?” Then I said in my heart, “This too is vanity (meaningless).” 16 For there is no [more] lasting remembrance of the wise man than of the fool, since in the days to come all will be long forgotten. And how does the wise man die? Even as the fool! 17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun caused me only great sorrow; because all is futility and chasing after the wind.

**II. The Futility of Wisdom and Folly (Verses 12-17)**

* Verses 12-14: Comparison; wisdom is better than folly as light is better than darkness.
* Verse 15: Realization that both the wise and the foolish share the same fate—death.
* Verse 16: Reflection on the fact that the wise, like the fool, are not remembered for long.
* Verse 17: Despair over the meaningless of life’s efforts, as both the wise and the fool meet the same end.

**The Futility of Labor**

18 So I hated all the fruit (gain) of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will succeed me. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity (futility, self-conceit). 20 So I turned aside and let my heart despair over all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun. 21 For there is a man who has labored with wisdom and knowledge and skill, yet gives his legacy to one who has not labored for it. This too is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what does a man get from all his labor and from the striving *and* sorrow of his heart with which he labors under the sun? 23 For all his days his work is painful and sorrowful; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity (worthless).

**III. The Futility of Toil (Verses 18-23)**

* Verses 18-19: Frustration with labor because what is toiled for must be left to someone else who may not be wise with what was left to them (Rehoboam and the kings of Israel after were mostly fools).
* Verses 20-21: Realization that all toil and skillful work are ultimately meaningless, as they may benefit someone who has not worked for them (no real appreciation).
* Verse 22-23: The endless labor and worry leave no rest, bringing more sorrow and grief.

24 There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and assure himself that there is good in his labor. Even this, I have seen, is from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? 26 For to the person who pleases Him God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who pleases God. This too is vanity and chasing after the wind.

**IV. Scriptures that echo this chapter**

**Isaiah 55:2**: "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare."

**Matthew 6:19-21**: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

**Proverbs 14:12**: "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death."

**James 1:5**: "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

**Psalm 127:1-2**: "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain. In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat— for he grants sleep to those he loves."

**Matthew 16:26**: "What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?"

**1 Timothy 6:17**: "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

**James 1:17**: "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."