

CHASING THE WIND – “PURSUE WISDOM”

The collection of writings known as **Ecclesiastes** is attributed to King Solomon, of whom Scripture says, **“God gave wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore.”** (1st Kings 4:7) His wisdom was greater than any other living in his time and his fame spread abroad. It’s not just that he was smart, though he may have had a high IQ. It’s not merely that he’d gained a lot from human experience either, though I’m confident that’s also true. Even trial and error can be a means to learn. Yet, the key to Solomon’s great wisdom was his honest admission of how clueless he really was. Consider 1st Kings 3:7-14. After sacrificing to God, he prayed:

“Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸ Your servant is here among the people You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹ So give Your servant a discerning heart to govern Your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of Yours?” ¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, **“Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I’ll do what you’ve asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for — both riches and honor — so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. ¹⁴ And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.”**

God granted him wisdom...and you know what? He promises to that for us to if we ask. (James 1:5) God gave him much more. Consistent with His nature as revealed in Scripture, when someone humbly approaches Him asking for the ability to bless someone else, God is very gracious. Now, a little word of caution. If our underlying motive is selfish, thinking the secret to open the storehouse of riches for personal gain is to ask for wisdom to lead others just so we can get everything we want, think again. That may be how politicians work, but that wasn’t the way Solomon’s heart was inclined. God doesn’t promise to answer such prayers.

By the time he writes **Ecclesiastes** though, Solomon’s outlook had changed. At some point he began to look at life from purely a material perspective, judging things **“under the sun.”** In the process, he concluded that the wisdom of God was insufficient, and started **“chasing”** after human reasoning, rationale, and refreshment. After all God had blessed him with, it baffles me how he could have developed a spirit of discontent, but he did. Open your Bible to the first chapter of **Ecclesiastes** and pay close attention to the words of the wise man. It’s page **1034** in the pew Bibles.

¹The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: ²**“Meaningless! Meaningless!”** says the Teacher. **“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”** ³What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? ⁴Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ⁵The sun rises and the sets, and hurries back to where it rises. ⁶The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. ⁷All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. ⁸All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. ⁹What has been will be again, what’s been done will be done again; there’s nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰Is there anything of which one can say, **“Look! This is something new”**? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. ¹¹There’s no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

¹² **I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.** So, this incredibly wise, wealthy king was bored to death; frustrated with the apparent futility of it all. Perhaps that's the most important lesson of all. No matter how much we have or how much we've accomplished we're going to eventually find it's all "misty vapors." That's the concept in the Hebrew word translated in many English versions of Scripture as "vanity" / "meaningless" or "empty." Thus the title for this series: "Chasing after the wind."

Reading on in **Ecclesiastes 1:13-14** we see that the wise man Solomon even developed a bad taste in his mouth for what he was best known for: wisdom. He says, ¹³ **I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!** ¹⁴ **I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.** Picking up now in chapter **2:12ff...** ¹² **Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already been done?** ¹³ **I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness.** ¹⁴ **The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both.** ¹⁵ **Then I said to myself, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless."** ¹⁶ **For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!** Ever notice that though one may adorn their walls with degrees and diplomas, the letters after the names are usually absent from **their tombstones**? And even if they're not, they hardly seem appropriate, because no matter how much you learn, the unmistakable fact is **that fools and scholars generally end up in the same graveyard.**

Now, is there something wrong with learning? Of course not. In fact, we need more folks aspiring to be doctors, scientists, researchers, and teachers. There's great **value in a proper education**. The issue however is if we place too much value on education, thinking it is the answer to all of our problems. Certainly no one thinks that, do they? We hear it all the time. "If everyone had a free ride to a college education, all of society's ills would be cured." Really? Some of the best educated people have been among the most ruthless criminals. Murder, rape, and terror attacks by college students and even perpetuated by professors are well documented. Though not as many get caught or are successfully prosecuted, white collar crime is not generally committed by the uneducated.

And no **Tibetan Monk** at the top of a mountain in the Himalayas has a better answer for the meaning of life than Solomon had already received from God. Yet, somehow Solomon became convinced that there must be more, thinking he might be missing out on some valuable, if not imperative information that would help make better sense of it all. We'll see just how wrong he was _ but in some ways his issue is our issue. We have the wisdom of God at our fingertips, but search the world over for deeper or easier or more satisfying answers. Surely some guru has a better idea of how to live life than God has revealed. Yet, the simple answer is really found in (**Proverbs 1:7; 2:1-6**).

It may surprise you that these words come from Solomon. ⁷ **The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.** / ¹ **...if you accept my words and store up my commands within you,** ² **turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding,** ³ **and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding,** ⁴ **and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure,** ⁵ **then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.** Solomon learned that early. He'd pursued wisdom from God, but lost his way. Let us not make the same mistake.