

## Daily Bible Study

### ***“I Can’t Get No Satisfaction” Part - 1***

***Ecclesiastes 1:1 – 2:11***

***May 5– May 11, 2013***

**THE LORD’S DAY & MONDAY** –Well, this week we begin our study of the book of **Ecclesiastes** and take as our text, **Ecclesiastes 1:1-2:11**. The book of Ecclesiastes besides being the inspired Word of God is a book of wise sayings. There is some minor debate concerning the authorship of the book as nowhere in the book does the author specifically give his name, but the descriptions he gave of himself and his experiences would indicate that the writer was King Solomon. He calls himself “*son of David*” and “*king in Jerusalem*” (**1:1, 12**), and he claimed to have great wealth and wisdom (**1:13, 2:1–11**) which obviously fit Solomon. Ecclesiastes is a translation of the Hebrew word *Qoheleth* which means collector, preacher, speaker in an assembly. It comes from a word which means to gather together or assemble and is similar to the word Ekklesia in the New Testament which is translated assembly or congregation. The Teacher has looked long and hard at life on earth and found nothing of lasting value. His opening cry is ‘*vanity of vanities*’! ‘*all is vanity*’! Thankfully, there is more to his message than despair as he wants us to stand back from short-term goals and pleasures and find our long-term pleasure and trust in God. Ecclesiastes takes its place alongside the other ‘wisdom’ books of the Bible—Job and Proverbs and together they show us that indeed ‘*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*’ (**Proverbs 1:7**). We hope in God as we understand how empty and pointless life is without him. Solomon clearly believes in God, but probes human experience to see if faith in God makes any difference. He often sounds disillusioned and cynical as he puts forth a point of view to test us and make us think. He exposes the selfishness and blind ambition that mars our lives while reminding us that our time here on earth is short. Read our text **Ecclesiastes 1-2:11**: “*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again. All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this is new”? It has already been in ancient times before us.*

*There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after. I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, And what is lacking cannot be numbered. I communed with my heart, saying, “Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.” And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also was vanity. I said of laughter—“Madness!” and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?” I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart rejoiced in all my labor; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.”*

*Suggestion for Prayer:* God, teach me this week from Sacred Scripture. Help me in this new study to learn the wisdom that comes from You and see that life is indeed empty without You.

**TUESDAY** – **Ecclesiastes 1:1-2**: “*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher; “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?”* We are hit smack in the face with what Ecclesiastes is all about in the summary of Solomon’s thoughts in **verses 1-2 of chapter 1**. *Vanity of vanities,*” lamented Solomon. Solomon liked the word “*vanity*” which means “vapor, breath, empty”. It speaks to something being empty, futile, and vanishing quickly leaving nothing behind. He uses the word almost 40 times in this book where he speaks about life here “*under the sun.*” From a merely human point of view; or a view “*under*

*the sun*”, life does indeed appear futile; and it is easy for us to get pessimistic. Life is filled with difficulties and problems and so many things that we find hard to understand. The King Preacher concluded without The Lord God all of life is vanity and folly. His wisdom here penned was read every year at Pentecost, the annual Feast of Tabernacles which was a joyful autumn festival of harvest. This often apparently gloomy dirge points us to joy and satisfaction. Solomon even tells us we are to see the big picture and understand it while enjoying the temporal “small picture” and be satisfied. “*There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labor. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God*” (2:24). The Apostle echoed these words to Timothy when he told him that God gives to us “*richly all things to enjoy*” (1 Timothy 6:17).

*Suggestion for Prayer:* God, help me to fight against the temptation to despair and be despondent. Help me to indeed understand like Solomon that life without you is depressing and empty but that You are gracious to even allow us enjoy this temporal life with Your blessing.

**WEDNESDAY** – Ecclesiastes 1:4-7: “*One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.*” Solomon now begins to explain his conclusion of all being vanity as he argues that “nothing is changed” as it were. He concludes from observation (science) that *generations* of people *come* and go and things of nature remained. There was “change” all around, yet nothing really changed. As the band Journey sang, “Oh the wheel in the sky keeps on turning...” Solomon speaks of everything being part of the “wheel” contributing to the monotony of life. Solomon’s argument that nothing changes is based on four pieces of evidence. *The earth* from the human point of view seems permanent and lasting. It operates in such a way that we can discover its “natural laws” and put them to work for our benefit. In fact, it is this “dependability” that is the basis for modern science. What is depressing here is that although nature seems permanent, man is not. He is merely a transient pilgrim on earth. His pilgrimage is brief as death finally claims him. *The sun* is his next illustration. The cycle of day and night is now in view. Solomon pictures the sun rising in the east and making its way across the sky to the western horizon. It does this day after day but what is accomplished? *The wind* seems also to be in this monotonous cycle of futility. He was not discussing physics of the wind and weather patterns but instead is saying the wind is in constant motion, following *circuits* that man cannot fully understand. Even Jesus weighed in on this when He told Nicodemus, “*The wind blows where it wishes and you ...cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes*” (John 3:8). So don’t be so upset with the weatherman next time he gets it wrong! His point again is that man comes and goes, but the changeless wind goes on forever. *The sea* is the final thing mentioned in this list of monotony as he describes here the “water cycle” of earth. The rivers run into the sea, but the

sea isn’t full and the water returns to do it all again. Solomon cites this monotony of life as his first argument to prove that life is empty and vain. This is indeed true only if you are focused on the temporal, leaving God out of the picture. We will see in our sermon God does indeed control and use nature for our good and His purpose and even God’s creation testifies to Jesus. As He cares for birds and lilies, He will in a greater way care for us (**Matthew 6:25-34**), therefore we rejoice and say with the hymn writer, “This is my Father’s world!”

*Suggestion for Prayer:* Lord, Help me see You created & control this order & cycle of nature as You see fit. You are worthy of praise! Thank You for caring for, loving, and teaching me.

**THURSDAY** – Ecclesiastes 1:8-11: “*All things are full of labor; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this is new”? It has already been in ancient times before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after.*” At face value, we may think we could argue with Solomon in light of modern inventions and technology and so forth but can we really? What is he really getting at here? He is saying men want something new to distract, deliver, or satisfy them. “New” is interesting, at least we think so and its pursuit can occupy all our time, thinking, and energy (**Acts 17:21**). But like those people cited in Acts, even while they are speaking, seeing, and hearing these “new things,” they are still dissatisfied with life and will do almost anything to find some escape. This is true in the Old Testament, New Testament and today as well. Why aren’t all the pursuits of life, even “new” things enough to satisfy us? Because as Solomon puts it in **Ecclesiastes 3:11**, God has put “*eternity in their heart*” and nobody can find peace and satisfaction apart from Him. St. Augustine said, “Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” The eye cannot be satisfied until it sees the hand of God, and the ear cannot be satisfied until it hears the voice of God. We must respond by faith to our Lord’s invitation, “Come unto me ... and I will give you rest” (**Matthew 11:28**). This world system can’t provide anything genuinely new, but God can. He makes new creatures from sinners (**2 Corinthians 5:17**) as they enter God’s presence by a *new and living way* (**Hebrews 10:20**). and He gives them a new walk (**Romans 6:4**), and a new song (**Psalms 40:3**), and one day they will enjoy “*a new heaven and a new earth*” (**Revelation 21:1**). It is then that God will say, “*Behold, I make all things new*” (**Revelation 21:5**). Until then, stop worshipping and pursuing “new”, because you are new in Jesus, Worship and pursue God!

*Suggestion for Prayer:* Lord God, forgive me of my sin of pursuing, chasing and “needing” something new or novel. I struggle to stay faithful to the “old paths”. Help me to rest in Your promise to make all things new and see the changes You have brought in my life as evidence.

**FRIDAY & SATURDAY** – Ecclesiastes 1:12-18: “*I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in*

*Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, And what is lacking cannot be numbered. I communed with my heart, saying, “Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.” And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”* As we will see Sunday in **chapter 2** Solomon attempted to find meaning to this life by searching for answers in “experimenting” with physical pleasures, costly, great works, and great material possessions. But before he does that he is going to now “think the matter through” and try to get to the bottom of his conclusion that all is vanity. He will find as he did; that nothing changes, nothing’s new, and nothing is really understood either without God. First he addresses that this life is a *burdensome task*. When God first gave life to man, the world had not been cursed because of sin (**Genesis 3**) but since the fall of man in sin and rebellion against God “*the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs*” (**Romans 8:22**). Everything done “*under the sun*” never truly satisfies the heart. They are but “*vanity and grasping for the wind*”. Solomon realizes that not everything will be changed; *What is crooked cannot be made straight*. He is saying the past can’t always be changed and its foolish and fruitless to stew over what might have been. The Living Bible paraphrases **verse 15**, “What is wrong cannot be righted; it is water over the dam; and there is no use thinking of what might have been” (TLB). We must not forget beloved, that God has the power to straighten out what is twisted and supply what is lacking. He won’t change the past, but He can change the way that the past affects us. Finally in chapter one we learn that *wisdom and knowledge (experience)* will not in themselves solve everything either. You can’t reason and explain everything away. Apart from understanding sin and its affects, there are no human explanations for some things that happen, and God is not obligated to explain them anyway. God also ordained His people live by faith in His *promise* and not by explanations. “*Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed*” (**John 20:29**). Even Solomon’s wisdom couldn’t make sense and solve all the futility. The only answer is Jesus Christ; “*the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (**1 Corinthians 1:24**). Life without Jesus is indeed “*vanity*” and “*vexation of spirit*”. Knowing Him and living for Him provide “*fullness of joy and pleasures forever more*” (**Psalms 16:11**). In the midst of this frustration of Ecclesiastes Jesus says, “*I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly*” (**John 10:10**) and Paul declares “*...your labor is not in vain in the Lord*” (**1 Corinthians 15:58**). Life is “not in vain” if it is lived according to the will of God, and that is what Solomon teaches us in this neglected and often misunderstood book.

*Suggestion for Prayer:* *God, thank You for such wonderful truth. Jesus, You brought meaning to life by coming to earth and carrying out the Divine plan of redemption! I Praise You!*