

Ecclesiastes 2:17-23

First Summary

Embrace God's plan of man's inability—1:1-2:26 (part 5)

- 1) A subjective response to ubiquitous death—2:17
  - a) <sup>17</sup> *So I hated life because what is done under the sun seemed bad to me, for all (seeming advantage) is illusory and striving after wind.*
    - i) Cf. 2:10
    - ii) This is not true repentance, though such intense disgust may lead to repentance.
  - b) Death seems to destroy any relative advantage of living wisely versus living foolishly. (cf. 2:14-16)
  
- 2) A subjective response to “You can’t take it with you”—2:18-21
  - a) I will leave it all behind—2:18-19 <sup>18</sup> *So I (emphatic) hated all my toil in which I (emphatic) have toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me (my successor). <sup>19</sup> And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will be master over all my toil for which I toiled and acted wisely under the sun. This also is illusory.*
    - i) Probably a reference to his son Rehoboam (cf. 1<sup>st</sup> Kings 11:9-13; 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 12:1-16)
  - b) I will hand it over to others who didn’t work for it like I did—2:20-21 <sup>20</sup> *So I (emphatic) turned aside my heart (deliberately) to despair (hopelessness) over all the toil for which I had toiled under the sun, <sup>21</sup> because there is a man who has toiled in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in skill; yet he must hand over an inheritance to a man who did not toil for it. This also is illusory and a great evil.*
    - i) “There is no guarantee that one’s heir will be wise and be a good steward of this wealth, or be foolish and squander it – in which case, the former man’s entire life’s work would be in vain.” (NET Bible)
  
- 3) Summary—2:22-23
  - a) A question of benefits—<sup>22</sup> *For what does a man get (acquire) in all his toil and striving of his heart with which he toils under the sun?*
    - i) Assume negative answer
    - ii) Cf. Genesis 3:17-19
  - b) A negative response, not merely neutral—<sup>23</sup> *For all his days are painful, and his occupation is a vexation; even in the night his heart does not rest (literally “does not lie down”). This also is illusory.*
    - i) Cf. Solomon’s words in Psalm 127:1-2
    - ii) “This verse draws out an ironic contrast/comparison between his physical toil/labor during the day and his emotional anxiety at night. Even at night, he has no break!” (NET Bible)