



Reflections From Ecclesiastes

The Meaninglessness
of Life Without God

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REFLECTIONS FROM THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

My goal in writing reflections from Ecclesiastes are the following: First, to encourage you the reader that if you will pay attention to the words on the page and listen carefully you will mine a lot of truth for life without the need of a commentary or any secondary source (although I provide a lexical explanation for the word *vanity* here). That is, “take up and read” to enrich your soul Christian.

Second, I write to give you a model of how observations can be done in scripture that do not read into the text something foreign to the author’s intent. This will help you experience the joy of discovery and increase your confidence in your ability to comprehend God’s word.

Third, by doing the above my hope is that you will be able to hear God’s voice all the more clearly and follow Him all the more closer. For, it is the word of God that is forever settled in heaven, and not our subjective impressions however valid they may be. That is, we have a more sure word of prophecy according to Peter—meaning the inscripturated word of God—then a glorious experience we may claim to have (2 Peter 1:16-21). Too often we Christians have bizarre ideas of what “God” is supposedly speaking to us and when it contradicts the Bible, be assured we are not hearing his voice.

ECCLESIASTES 1-4: THE PREACHERS DOWNWARD MUSINGS

The pace at which time moves astounds me. The year is almost up and what was true for Solomon applies to me “*A generation goes and a generation comes, But the earth remains forever.*” (1:4) It’s a humbling fact—the span of our lives, my life, is ever so slight! The letter of James in the New Testament agrees:

“¹³ Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.” ¹⁴ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.” ¹⁶ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil.”

This pessimistic account from the Preacher king, though negative is true. Nothing is new under the sun but foolish mankind would disagree (1:9). Of particular interest and serious consideration is the task of exploring wisdom

concerning the created order, which from his view is the acquisition of affliction and grief:

“¹² I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. ¹⁴ I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.” (1:12-14)

According to Solomon, wisdom and its acquisition is burdensome, unlike Proverbs, this book hits us with a bombshell affirming life’s futility. With the acquisition of wisdom there’s much grief and the end of increased knowledge is pain:

“¹⁶ I said to myself, “Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.” ¹⁷ And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind. ¹⁸ Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.” (1:16-18)

What a realist view of labor and what a downer for someone who wants to pursue the knowledge of God. There is however here more than meets the eye. There’s something the Preacher—Solomon the wisest man to have ever lived other than Christ Jesus—wants the reader to get his angle, but it’s going to require more reading to grasp his thought.

LORD, help me understand this book in light of its purpose and message.
(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 2: THE PREACHERS DOWNWARD MUSINGS—VANITY

Part 2

In my struggle and acquaintance with failure concerning every sector of existence (E.g., moral, practical and contemplative) the Preacher’s outlook is not re-assuring but utterly depressing.

Vanity, futility, empty, meaningless are all man’s endeavors under the sun and thus so is his life. The Preacher indulged himself with pleasure and came up empty whether sexual, intellectual or acquisitional pleasure, it’s all empty:

“I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. ² I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” ³ I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives. ⁴ I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; ⁵ I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; ⁶ I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees. ⁷ I bought male and female slaves and I had home born slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all 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 and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.” (2:1-8)

He became greater than all of his predecessors and still his activities are considered useless (Vv.9-11). There’s no boasting here but deprecation of all the things worldly men (of which I once numbered) would die for! Wine, women and song, riches and pleasures galore—empty says the preacher!

He understood that wisdom far excels folly as the light conquers the darkness and yet even this to him is vain because like the fool so the wise man will die and his memorial will be forgotten:

“So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what will the man do who will come after the king except what has already been done? ¹³ And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. ¹⁴ The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both. ¹⁵ Then I said to myself, “As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?” So I said to myself, “This too is vanity.” ¹⁶ For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man as with the fool, inasmuch as in the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die! ¹⁷ So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.” (2:12-17)

The herald understanding his plight completely despaired of life, his legacy and his toil, the accumulation of which is vanity (2:18-23). Yet, he reflects on the good life and considers that its basis is found in God alone and happiness is to be had in Him alone:

“There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. ²⁵ For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? ²⁶ For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God’s sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.” (2:24-26)

God gives wisdom to the wise and good person but for the sinner (who in this context is the opposite) their task is gathering and collecting for those God sees as good. The struggle and restlessness this nihilistic Preacher is enduring is horrible to bear. The Preacher is saying that existence without God is empty, a breath not worth taking, toil that leads to “nowhere” in the blink of the eye.

What a dark hole his soul sank into, what an empty chasm he’s fallen into, what a dingy dungeon is his abode, the abyss has (almost entirely) swallowed him up.

God and the meaning of life is ***the question*** for the man who has wandered from the paths of righteousness. His plight is a warning to all who do shun God, deny his existence and indulge in fleeting pleasures—emptiness is the reward. Why? Because all pleasures in life that put God at the periphery are vain being He is the giver and sustainer of life in whom there is no darkness at all.

The Preacher is warning me to flee all pleasures that have not God at the hub, to consider the vanity of life without Him and to pursue Him in my gloomiest hour for He alone will not disappoint.
(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF VANITY?

In Hebrew, the word for vanity is *hebel*—הֶבֶל, which means “vapor” or “breath”. This word is dominant in the book of Ecclesiastes compared to the rest of the Old Testament books. *Hebel* can refer to that which is, worthless or unsubstantial such as an idol (Jer.10:5) or life itself (Job 7:16).¹ This word is found

¹ BDB, Pg.210

in contexts where the activity engaged brings no profit be it through: Egypt's might (Is. 30:7); idol worship (Dt. 32:21) or Abel and Cain's labor (Gen. 4).

Hebel evaluates people and things making value judgements on such and concludes that these lack any real "substance."² Deceitfully gaining riches in light of our finitude for example is *hebel*—worthless. Among our worthlessness under the sun is our might, beauty and youth all of which in our culture are worshipped (Prov. 31:30; Is. 30:7; Ec. 11:10).³

To the Preacher, it is death that precisely makes life meaningless or vain (Ec.3:19) and that is why he is so pessimistic about human existence. In Ecclesiastes the dominant use of *hebel* is the universally considered devaluation of a person or thing.⁴ The nihilism is very dark and gloomy for life without God is no life at all. That's the message, that's the reality check, that's the abyss. (SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 3: THE PREACHER ON TIME & ETERNITY

"There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven__" (3:1). This chapter doesn't feel as gloomy as the first two but he considers the issue of "time". What is time in this context? According to the Preacher, time is a successive series of events which begin and end (e.g., a time to give birth, a time to die 3:2). There are several aspects I want to consider.

First, there once was a "time" I did not exist, then came the time of my birth, and a day awaits when I will finally die. One day, life as we experience it and know it will no longer be. But will "I" or "we" cease to exist? There are some who would concur that eventually we go out of existence. However, according to the Scriptures and especially in the Gospel accounts (i.e., Mathew, Mark, Luke and John) you and I will either live forever in the blessed presence of Christ or in the eternal wrathful presence of God called hell.

Second, the Preacher acknowledges that God has made all things appropriate in their time (v.11) and He has also set eternity in the hearts of men (v.11b). What's interesting to me is that God, "in" time, which will never end, has placed eternity into men's *hearts*. I'm not altogether certain why that is but the purpose seems, "so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end" (v.11c).

² TDOT, Pgs.313-314

³ Ibid., Pg.319

⁴ Ibid., Pg.319

This beginning and end seems to refer to “everything under heaven or the creation”. Eternity here can very well be the state in time where man will forever gaze into the works of God, eternally beholding the Master’s handiwork in order to marvel at the immensity and the intricacies of His glory.

Third, the preacher knows that *rejoicing* and, *doing good* in one’s lifetime is the ultimate goal for existence (v.12). This after all is in the contexts of eating, drinking, and laboring. The one who recognizes that these activities are good must then acknowledge that they come from God. This is not luck, fate, karma, nor destiny. Instead, it’s the kindness of the Creator toward the creature who too often does not give honor nor give thanks to Him.

It’s been my experience even as a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, that I have not found any delight in work but rather loathed it. I often have not been thankful nor appreciated the skills for earning wealth I possess. Perhaps you can relate friend to this kind of experience. We need to pray that these three activities are seen for what they are—good.

This is important because too often, we tend to miss the splendor of the mundane by longing for the splendor filled day. According to the Preacher, (v.22) “...nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities because that is man’s lot....For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?” The three activities (of eating, drinking, and laboring,) apportioned to us (by God) are our lot. Enjoying them *now* is all that we are assured. For when we die these activities, like our lives will cease.

What a challenge to be in the moment and maximize our joy in these activities, rather than squander the opportunity “in time” allotted to us. These are all gifts from God. Today LORD God, give us your people the wisdom to live in light of eternity in this present fleeting life. Teach us LORD to be happy in the lot you have determined for us to experience by keeping us from forfeiting said delight through actions and thoughts that dishonor your name.
(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 4: THE PREACHER’S DOWNWARD MUSINGS

The Preacher is quite pessimistic and the level of seeming despair is evident when he reasons after beholding the defenseless oppressed and those crushed by the strong and mighty:

“Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and that they

had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort them. ² So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. ³ But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun.” (Vv.1-4)

The oppressed and their tears exacerbates the Preacher’s experience as he considers the lack of comfort the downtrodden receive, “...*they had no one to comfort them...*” and the power of those oppressing them. The weak ruled by the mighty, the defenseless overcome by the strong, and bitterness is the soup of the needy.

The Preacher saw acts of oppression which caused him to conclude that the “dead” (v.2a) are better off than the living. That’s pessimism on steroids, to congratulate the dead over against the oppressed, but the Preacher is not yet finished. Not only are the dead praised for not being in the muck of life, but those who have never come into existence are better off than the dead. How can one *be* better off than the oppressed and the dead if they *aren’t* or never have been? In his view, to behold the evil his eyes have witnessed and the damage inflicted on the soul is so severe, that seemingly what can’t be—a knowing and non-existent knower—is better than the alternative of existing and thus suffering horrible ills.

While there’s oppression and evil, there’s also liberty and goodness, but then again the gloom that looms over a life without God is acutely unbearable. I have not experienced the evils many have through the annals of time, but I have experienced despair and wrestled with dark thoughts of suicide because of suffering. For the follower of Jesus, under such circumstances, Paul reminds us that God is working on our behalf behind the scenes:

“²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.²⁹ For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;³⁰ and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”
(Romans 8:28-30)

So, when despair seems to be swallowing you up believer, know that it is momentary and that the heavenly Father has not abandoned you, but is rather working through the pain to make you more like Jesus.

To the non-believer or skeptic, my suggestion is for you to investigate the claims of Christ to see whether or not they make sense to you. For of all the authorities that command us how to live, only Christ Jesus claimed to be the uncreated creator who is self-existent and conquered the grave through the resurrection. Thus, to dismiss his claims, which came through eyewitness accounts, as mere fantasy, is not only pedestrian, but it's a brazen refusal to behold the immense evidence that support his claims.

LORD, when darkness comes remind us that you truly are our light, that a life without you truly is meaningless, ugly, cold, and gray. Teach us to look to you when suffering seems too unbearable and grant the grace required for us to finish the race set before us as we look to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.
(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 5: HOW TO UNPRESUMPTIOUSLY APPROACH GOD

This chapter starts off warning against being foolish when approaching God in worship:

“Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil. ² Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore let your words be few. ³ For the dream comes through much effort and the voice of a fool through many words. ⁴ When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! ⁵ It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. ⁶ Do not let your speech cause you to sin and do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? ⁷ For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God. (Vv.1-6)

Our demeanor here seems to be foolish and evil if we think that our primary function of worship is to “offer” religious duty to God (as if He needed anything from us). The sacrifice of fools prevents them from principally “hearing” the law of the LORD when it’s read and explained. There are several lessons I have derived from this text.

First, my heart must first be instructed through God’s self-disclosure in Scripture through my mind before any offering I give is acceptable to God. That is, clear instruction on God’s intended meaning in Scripture precedes and is to inform the worshipper on how to approach this great God.

Second, if primacy to the aforesaid is not given, then idolatry will follow which at its core takes God’s name in vain (i.e., misrepresents His nature and character) and leads the devotee into bondage because God’s truth is substituted for a lie. Right doctrine is necessary for right living.

Third, the fool apparently parades his folly through much “speech”. That is, the fool has forgotten to consider that true worship can’t be bifurcated or separated from the knowing and doing dynamic. It is the two-sided coin of acceptable worship before God for when we don’t follow through on what we have vowed (promise made), sin results. For as the standard of truth, goodness and beauty, God always does what He says and says what He does. His people are to follow suit.

What a difficult concept for us to consider and live out in a culture that largely de-values truth telling on the one hand (e.g., P.C. speech), but deeply longs for it on the other hand. Jesus said that believers must be people whose word can be counted on:

“³³ Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’³⁴ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,³⁵ or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING.³⁶ Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.” (Mt.5:33-37)

The fourth lesson is that it’s better to refrain from speaking than to proceed and to sin (v.6). I have often dishonored people and God with my speech. This human malady has been around since the beginning of time and is out of control

through our social media forums. Believers need to be very careful how they speak about people with whom they disagree for human beings are precious image bearers not accidents of evolutionary theory.

Of all the created order, what separates human beings from it is the capacity we have for communication through words. It is the instrumentality of words that the soul reveals ideas which have the power to either edify or decimate individuals, communities, provinces and even nations.

Like many of you, I'm prone to much speech. My tone, timing, and audience make the art of communicating well difficult to master. But believer and unbeliever alike will give an account to God for every idol word that comes out of our hearts. This is sobering and worthy to consider.

(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 6: THE PREACHERS DOWNWARD MUSINGS Continued

“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun and it is prevalent among men—² a man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor so that his soul lacks nothing of all that he desires; yet God has not empowered him to eat from them, for a foreigner enjoys them. This is vanity and a severe affliction.”

What is this evil that one with the power resources bring, lacks the ability to enjoy its treasure? It seems that the Preacher is alluding to something that both the rich and the poor lack: the gift from God to not only be stewards of their lot in life but also to have the capacity to enjoy it. I think he is saying that the ability to enjoy what we have is not earned, but granted to us by our maker. Perhaps the reason so many people are miserable is precisely because God has not gifted them with the capacity to enjoy their station in life.

What lessons are here to learn? First, it seems that to have God's gifts but not the capacity to enjoy them is evil. It's not the way things should be but they are. So if I don't know how to enjoy what things I have, either God has not granted me the gift, or He has and I'm too stupid to get it.

Second, this gift as I've said before does not come from within me, the creature, but from the Creator. Here again we are reminded of our finitude and contingent existence which is so needy and the pride within suppresses that truth.

Third, to possess riches and honor on the one hand and to lack the goods enabling us to enjoy them is a severe affliction, it is misery. Yet the poor can't

relate here in one sense to the burden of the rich. Perhaps that's why in the book of Proverbs there are many warnings to cease the pursuit of riches, for without God riches are a cruel abyss of unfulfilled desires.

Lastly, I think we need God's strength, even though we may not be rich, to enjoy our lot in life by remembering that it is God alone who gives life and possessions meaning. May we delight in the LORD today, as we seek Him for our own good and the good of others.

(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 7: IT'S BETTER TO MOURN THAN IT IS TO REJOICE?

There's nothing new under the sun which includes our bent to avoid the issue of death. Whenever I talked to my father about death he almost always side-stepped the conversation by changing the topic to one that was more "happy". The Preacher's instruction here is hard to swallow for a society that worships wealth, health, entertainment and the absence of pain. Death simply decimates those aspirations and reminds us that our appointment with it is looming:

*A good name is better than a good ointment,
And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.
2 It is better to go to a house of mourning
Than to go to a house of feasting,
Because that is the end of every man,
And the living takes it to heart. (Vv.1-2)*

The house of mourning says the Preacher is "better than" or "preferable to" the "party" because it lurches us into questioning the meaning of life and forces us to confront our inevitable death. A funeral, not a feast wakes us up to the ultimate issue of life after death which the naturalist denies (ala atheism), or the monist attributes as illusory (ala Buddhism or Hinduism), but Christian theism explains so well in the Gospel accounts and in the book of Roman.

LORD, help us and teach us to live our lives in light of our appointed death today in word and deed. May we hold on to things loosely in light of eternity as we serve our fellow man for your NAME'S sake, and may we be vigilant.

(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 8: WISDOM LIGHTS THE FACE

“Who is like the wise man and who knows the interpretation of a matter? A man’s wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.” (v.1)

The wise man is not a common sight these days. I can attest to my utter shame that I tend to lack much wisdom and it sickens me. As a result my countenance isn’t radiant, but rather gloomy. This text supports the notion that happiness is a direct result of wisdom (i.e., the proper application of knowledge to a given situation that is aligned with the design and purpose of God).

Our culture sadly prizes glamour, fame, and stuff not wisdom. It’s too bad since all of us are daily faced with pressing decisions that often are not easy to unravel. Paul in his 2nd letter to Timothy reminds the young pastor that the Scriptures (graphe=the inscripturated word of God) “makes one wise unto salvation”. Note this comes from Scripture, the Word, who according to John 1:1 is the incarnate Son, the 2nd person of the triune God.

The Psalmist somewhere declares that, “In your (God’s) light we see light”. This I take to infer that the “obvious” is hidden from us when we walk in darkness. Sin, according to Scripture, has a blinding and darkening effect on our soul’s ability to reason and apprehend the true, beautiful and good. Could it be that this wisdom which illumines the heart is reflected in the face of one who is wise?

The proverbs say that, “the fear of the LORD is wisdom” and that this wisdom is *given* by the LORD. Perhaps the longing for autonomy—which is impossible for finite creatures—actually darkens our pursuit of worthy things. Clearly from this text in 8:1 a heart filled with wisdom illumines the face, displays the joy on the face of its possessor. The pursuit of happiness that is so dear to everyone I know breathing misses out on that reality truly when the Word of God is neglected and ignored. Lord have mercy on me!

(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 9: THE PREACHERS DOWNWARD MUSINGS AGAIN

“For I have taken all this to my heart and explain it that righteous men, wise men, and their deeds are in the hand of God. Man does not know whether it will be love or hatred; anything awaits him. ² It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who

does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear.³ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one fate for all men. Furthermore, the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil and insanity is in their hearts throughout their lives. Afterwards they go to the dead. (vv1-3)

The depths of despair and meaninglessness of life is once again emphasized by the preacher's view that all human beings die. It seems that in his view thus far, he doesn't think there's an afterlife but extinction. Whether one is a blasphemer or a bastion of righteousness death equalizes them both and its certainty makes our deeds worthless, insignificant, useless and futile.

Whether one is devoted to God or to self in the end it doesn't matter. This view is dark and utterly horrific to my soul, for it leaves me only to meander pitifully in this existence until I finally am no more. What despair! what hopelessness, what a tragedy if in fact the preacher is correct. Now if God does not exist then he is "dead on!" There is no ultimate meaning in life.

LORD, help me live today as if it were my last one. Make me a vessel of honor, season my lips with salt and keep my eyes fixed on you LORD so that I may boldly and graciously capitalize on given opportunities.
(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 10: A WORD TO NOT BACK DOWN

²A wise man's heart directs him toward the right, but the foolish man's heart directs him toward the left.³ Even when the fool walks along the road, his sense is lacking and he demonstrates to everyone that he is a fool. ⁴If the ruler's temper rises against you, do not abandon your position, because composure allays great offenses." (Vv.2-4)

To be a fool is not difficult, but to be wise that is another reality altogether. When I considered verse 4 at first glance immediately I thought of the subject's intellectual view which the ruler at first impulse vehemently rejects. Here, the Preacher encourages the subject to stay his ground, to not back down from his ideational position.

Here, the characteristic of courage before a sovereign (these are King Solomon's words) can affect the outcome of a subjects request in his favor. Perhaps that is an aspect of what this text is teaching. Again, another angle here may be the battle field for to panic in the midst of lethal peril assures defeat, but

where cooler heads prevail (generally) victory is within grasp. Assuredly many other angles can be applied here that I have missed perhaps even misinterpreted the text.

Nevertheless, as a follower of Jesus of Nazareth, I note the following: First, for the Christian who loves Jesus, the Truth must be prized above the approval of men even a raging king. Here, courage is necessary for the power a ruler has to wield us harm is real, not an illusion for you might meet your death.

Second, courage under fire is not easy, but is nevertheless the high road to victory under opposition from powerful people, not the converse. Third, whether an actual battlefield or a metaphorical one of ideas is raging, don't back down even though you be outnumbered. Fourth, persuasion does not come from a slothful soul but from the diligent who is trained in righteousness for the watching world to consider and does affect both enemies and allies.

LORD, give us courage under fire when it comes to living out the truth of what it means to be in this world but not of it as your ambassadors. Whether we be outnumbered and are dwarfed by our enemies resources, grant us boldness before those who mock, blaspheme and hate your name.

(SDG)

ECCLESIASTES 11-12: A WORD TO THE YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE

“Just as you do not know the path of the wind and how bones are formed in the womb of the pregnant woman, so you do not know the activity of God who makes all things.” (11:5)

The context of this passage is somewhat unclear to me. The Preacher begins with the command to “cast your bread upon the water...” (v.1) and “sow seed” (v.6) as perhaps an allusion to the cycle of sowing and reaping which is realized ultimately through God's activity as the sovereign over all creation. This is the wonder of life which is designed not accidental, it's purposeful not meaningless because God is there. This activity is as much marvelous as it is mysterious, like the formation of a child in the womb or the course of the wind.

It seems that somehow the Preacher commands us to walk in wisdom by trusting in God's power to multiply our efforts even if we don't understand all the details. He continues:

“^a Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart

and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things. ¹⁰ So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.”

In America, there seems to be little rejoicing in today's youth. Instead there's much anger, confusion and despair in a culture given over to self-indulgence, leisure and entertainment. A life lived for others is increasingly not the norm, the pied pipers of sex, drugs and rock n roll have not helped but rather aided this cauldron of foolishness and we are not the better for it. Included here are professing followers of Jesus who neither know his book nor his pleasure.

The point the preacher is making is that your Creator is going to personally judge your fleeting life so what are you living for? The same applies to adults and the old who often refuse to think again in light of eternity. Throughout this book the Preacher has emphasized the futility of life...if God does not exist. He concludes chapter 12 of Ecclesiastes with sobering words:

“⁹ In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. ¹¹ The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. ¹² But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body. ¹³ The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. ¹⁴ For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”

In the midst of his nihilism, the Preacher comes to the conclusion that God really does exist, therefore the way we live really matters for **every act** whether hidden or not will be judged by Him.

The way we live does truly matter, the motives of our hearts are actually laid bare before the Creator and all is therefore not vain for God as the author of all life and existence gives these meaning.

The words of this book come from Solomon, noted for being the wisest man to have lived apart from Jesus of Nazareth. Life without God is meaningless,

but because God is there, it is absolutely meaningful even though we don't understand many things in it.

For the believer in Christ Jesus, this is a wake-up call to follow the Master even when life becomes difficult and pain starts drowning out the truth of God's revelation in scripture.

For the nonbeliever, this too is an alarm to bend the knee to Christ who will judge the living and the dead. Understand that the love, comfort, justice and peace you deeply long for can only be found in the Righteous One who perfectly executes justice and mercy and that...righteously!

So LORD, help your people live in light of your existence. Tenderize our hearts to your promptings, open our minds to your thoughts, empower our lives with your strength, so that we may live this short life apportioned to us with passion, ardor and increasing resolve for the kingdom of God and your righteousness, so that it may truly be said of us when our time is done here on earth that we were people who loved God and neighbor.

(SDG)