

Ecclesiastes 2: 12-16; "Then I saw that Wisdom excels Folly",
A Bible Study prepared for the Evening of May 28th, 2008.

Solomon has pursued madness and folly for a time, trying to find lasting meaning and satisfaction in them. He engaged in this pursuit of earthly and human pleasure vigorously, with wisdom still at his side guiding him. He did not pursue earthly delights in a way that would ruin his body or destroy his reputation among men. This was an experiment to try to find happiness in the things that he would do to please himself. As a part of this experiment he also built great works; works which he thought would bring him lasting fame and greatness in the eyes of men. "I made my works great..." he says in verse 4. In verse 9 we see that he succeeded in these endeavors of building and acquiring and gathering. It says, "So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem." He succeeded in the eyes of men; but he was not succeeding in the eyes of God. Why was this? Well, the reason can be plainly seen in the phrases found in verses 5 and 6 and in the thought that runs through the rest; it is the words, "I made myself" these great things. He was doing it for himself. For the most part, he was not doing it so that God would receive the glory. He was doing these works for his own glory. When the things that we do are done to the glory of the God who has made us for His good pleasure, then true satisfaction can be found by any person. To whatever extent we are seeking God's glory in the things that we do; to that extent we will be blessed with true and lasting happiness. What is it that brings you true and lasting happiness? Is it giving of yourself to the glory of God? "It is more blessed to give than to receive", the Lord Jesus said at one point. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1: 31, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all the glory of God."

To find true happiness it is not enough to be observant of what pleases us. To find true happiness we must seek and find what is pleasing to God and what will, in a right way, please and help others. Verses 10 and 11 confirm our analysis of why Solomon could not find lasting happiness and pleasure. He says, "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 for all my labor." Solomon did have a rejoicing and a satisfaction in all his labor. There was the reward of engaging in the planning and execution of the works of building and gardening. But it did not last very long. These works had to be maintained. There was the reward of gathering the riches of silver and gold and the special treasure of kings. But even this kind of satisfaction, as great as it must have been, was not lasting. He always seemed to need a little more. He will speak more of it in the coming chapters. In chapter 5, verse 10, he will say, "He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor he who loves abundance, with increase." "This also is vanity." There was the reward of having gathered to himself male and female singers; the delight of having music and musical instruments of all kinds. This was very pleasant indeed. But the question is, "Did he not have to often seek to have

greater variety and greater levels of skill in these people to be truly satisfied? And was the music that he listened to something that was bringing glory to God? There is a music, he knew which did bring glory to God, and there was a music which was simply the ability of men to please themselves in an earthly sense. He sensed that there was something lacking. "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."

Solomon was coming to a very important conclusion and we find it written down in verse 12. "Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; for what can the man do who succeeds the king?--Only what he has done." "Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness." This is Solomon's conclusion. We want to ask 3 questions this evening. First -What is it about wisdom that makes it excel folly? Then 2ndly - What is the difference between a wise man and a fool? And then 3rdly - What are the similarities between the wise man and the fool, and should we hate life because of it? This will be plenty for us to think about.

1st - What is it about wisdom that makes it excel folly? (Verse 13)

"Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness." It is in the nature of wisdom, that its excellence to ourselves is found. It is in the nature of folly that its disagreeableness to ourselves is found. A comparison is made between light and darkness and a statement is made. "Wisdom excels folly." Light is better than darkness. So then we must ask ourselves, "In what sense is wisdom like light?" And, "In what sense is folly like darkness?" Wisdom, the wisdom that is from God, is like light in that it is given and sent from God Himself. When God gives or shines light, He is giving understanding. There are different kinds of wisdom, as we are learning here. There is the wisdom which is from God that is given to natural men to make them spiritual. And there is wisdom from God which is given to natural men to be gifted and to do great works. Unbelievers as well as believers are ordained and equipped to do and to accomplish things in an orderly, useful, and profitable way, so that either they or others they work for are happy with the result. And this fulfills God's purposes and plans as well. This ability is based upon the light or understanding which comes from God as a gift, although the person himself may not be aware that it is from God himself. If he is aware of it, he will not boast in it, his own understanding or ability, but he will give glory to God for this ability if he is wise. He will use the wisdom and understanding that are given to him in a way that is profitable to God and other people.

Let me give you several examples of this. Turn to Exodus 31: 2. God is giving Moses instructions on the building of the tabernacle. And he says to him, "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah." "And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work

in all manner of workmanship." "And I have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you..." You can see from these words that the wisdom that gave these men the skill to do artistic works came directly from God's Spirit. This was no doubt, an extraordinary gift, but you can see how it also applies to the wisdom that God gives to any man, naturally, to have a skill and the ability to do it well. God is Light and He gives light. "In His light, we see light." Turn over to 1 Kings 7: 13. Solomon is going to build the temple. Solomon knows that Hiram, king of Tyre has some very capable men who could help in this work. It says, "Now king Solomon sent and brought Hiram from Tyre." "He was the son of a widow from the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a bronze worker; he was filled with wisdom and understanding and skill in working with all kinds of bronze work." "So he came to King Solomon and did all his work." Now whether these men knew the Lord or not, is not said. One would almost assume that they did. But it is possible that they did not. But they were given a wisdom which came from God in regard to physical and natural things. They were filled with this wisdom by Him. They would bring glory to God by their works. Wisdom excels folly in this regard, every time. It is always profitable to God's people when there are those among them, or those who are brought in to work among them; those who have skills in being able to organize and teach and make things in relation to a building project. Solomon saw this man's gifts and appreciated them. They were not unto vanity, but unto the glory of God. The problem was with Solomon's trying to find his own satisfaction in wisdom apart from the glory of God. But this is even more apparent when it comes to what is profitable in terms of spiritual things, as we shall see in a few moments. Wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

But 2ndly- What is the difference between a wise man and a fool? (Verse 14)

"A wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness." You probably remember that the Bible teaches very plainly that it is the "fool who has said in his heart that there is no God." (Psalm 14: 1) It is possible, however, for a believer to play the part of a fool in the sense that Solomon is warning us about here tonight; a man living to his own glory and his own pleasures. Edward Reynolds, in his commentary says this, "Wisdom leaves behind it some permanent good, as the word here imports; whereas pleasures do perish in their use, and nothing stays behind them but the sting and sorrow." "The sorrow of wisdom is in the getting." "But the sorrow of pleasures is after the using and enjoying of them." But it is good for us to understand, as Solomon came to understand, that fools and folly go hand in hand. You cannot be wise in a truly spiritual and lasting sense and pursue folly. Solomon thought that he could, by guiding his heart with wisdom. He thought to "lay hold on folly", as it says in verse 3, "until he might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives." But now he came to know better. "I saw that wisdom excels folly, as light excels

darkness." He came to learn and to understand how folly is moral stupidity in the sight of God. It ought to be in our sight as well. It is not profitable to our soul or the souls of others. "The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness."

The wise man's eyes being in his head means that he is sober-minded, he is seeking with all of his heart to find the right things to do with his time, his strength, and his money so that he will be godly. A man whose eyes are in his head is not always trying to joke around and be funny in the way he lives. He may have a godly sense of humor, but he thinks about how his words and deeds affect others. He thinks about what God would think of him if he was to say or to do this, that or the other thing. His focus is God first and foremost of all, and not the world. Yes, he lives in the world, he interacts with it by putting into practice godly principles of Scripture truth in relation to everything that he is involved in; job, family, and church membership. But he is not "of" the world. The fool does not think of these things. Turn with me to Proverbs 17: 24. "Wisdom is in the sight of him who has understanding, but the eyes of the fool are on the ends of the earth." Wisdom being in the sight of him who has understanding, I have just explained to you. But the fool is one who is always thinking that there is something else, something better, something more pleasing, something more interesting, something greater and better for him to be doing than what is right before him now, in the things that God has given him to do. The "grass is always greener on the other side" and he is going to find it he thinks. But he is never really satisfied. He will tell you so if you ask him. The fool walks in the darkness of his own mind. Proverbs 26: 12 says, "Do you see a man wise in his own eyes?" "There is more hope for a fool than for him." How much better it is to be satisfied with the good things of Christ and the Scriptures and letting God lead in your life, rather than your eyes being on the ends of the earth. If you cannot your find satisfaction here, in God, you will not find satisfaction there without His blessing. Real satisfaction is found in knowing God and walking with God.

3rdly- What are the similarities between the wise man and the fool and should we hate our life because of it?

Verse 14b says, "Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all." "So I said in my heart, 'as it happens to the fool, it also happens to me, and why was I then more wise?'" "Then I said in my heart, this also is vanity." "For there is no remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come." "And how does a wise man die?" "As the fool!" Since both the wise man and the fool must come to the house of death, it does at times seem foolish to one who is comparing the two, to have pursued being wise. Why not just live for the pleasures of my own selfish perspective now? Does it really make a difference. Should a Christian hate his life? Solomon hated his, it says in verse 17. Everything that he worked so hard to see built and established; all of his earthly and worldly pleasures passing by and passing away forever! But Solomon; you know that there is so much more with God. Sometimes we forget

God, even when we know Him. The wisdom that God gave to Solomon; it does indeed excel folly, even as light does darkness. "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a just man, and he will increase in learning." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding." Should we hate our life knowing that we, as well as the fool will have to suffer a physical death? No, for ours is the entrance to eternal life and blessing. His is the entrance to eternal death and misery. No, do not forget God. Whenever Solomon did he fell into distress and despair. Half of being a Christian is remembering God. The other half is remembering ourselves in relation to him. It is a relationship of faith in the Lord Jesus, the Holy One of God.
