

# **A REFLECTION ON WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS**

## **Ecclesiastes 1:1**

### **EYANRIN SUNDAY (EVANG.)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In Continuation of our study of this marvelous Book known as Ecclesiastes, last week the Minister, Bro. E. Adeoye took us through Chapter 1:1-11. On the topic **“FINDING THE TRUE VALUE OF LIFE”**

He started verse 1, by introducing the author of the Book as the Preacher, the Son of David King in Jerusalem. It is interesting to note that “Ecclesiastes” is a Latin word that means “Preacher.

In verse 2, he declared, “Vanity of vanity” says the preacher, “Vanity of vanities all is vanity”.

The minister emphasized greatly on the word “*Vanity*” as (Meaningless, Emptiness, etc.). He cited an example of Vanity with a head of state who amassed so much wealth to himself, one day death took him away leaving all behind. And all his ill-gotten wealth was taken over by the Government. This tells us what vanity all is about. The minister concluded his message by reminding us that there is nothing new that has not happened. All are vanity of vanity.

He encouraged Christians to be active in winning souls for the Lord through Evangelism, which is the greatest work of the Church. And we shall be blessed. ***1 Timothy 4:16***

Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you. (NKJV)

Today, we shall be looking at **chapter 1:12-18**, of the Book of Ecclesiastes. In verse 12, he declared: *I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.* Our experience is limited by our position. You and I are unlikely to ever experience genuine power and authority. If we are fortunate, we may achieve a position in the workplace where we get to manage staff. It is unlikely that we will ever be Chief Executive of a major corporation; it is even more unlikely that we will ever be Prime Minister and none of us will ever be king.

Solomon was king at the greatest moment in Israel's history. In his day, Israel was, in effect, the only superpower. Solomon was, then, the greatest King of Israel at the greatest moment in Israel's history. Solomon's reign defines the apex of Israel's history. This is why Solomon is able to declare, in ***Ecclesiastes 2:9***:

*So, I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. This is significant. Our experience is limited by our authority and we will never be able to regard life from Solomon's position. Solomon's perspective on life is unique.*

***Ecclesiastes 1:13-14*** He declared:

*<sup>13</sup>And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. <sup>14</sup>I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.*

Here Solomon goes further than last week. Last week we saw that 'all is vanity', now Solomon declares that it is 'an unhappy business' that God has given man. In truth, the ESV translates this generously. The Hebrew word, *ra*, here translated 'unhappy business' is incredibly strong and is elsewhere translated as 'evil'. Yet, this is not the most shocking aspect of this passage,

we find that behind this 'unhappiness', behind this 'evil', lies the sovereign hand of God; 'It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with'. This is a step beyond the Apostle Paul's conclusion that it is God who has subjected creation to this futility,

***Romans 8:20***

*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it. This requires careful thought. The Hebrew word here translated 'given' elsewhere is used to talk of permission and ordaining. Solomon's point is this: life is an unhappy business in which we chase the wind only to be left with a handful of air and behind this futility lies the sovereign hand of God permitting and ordaining that life be this way. Furthermore, we find that even Solomon's quest for understanding is, in itself, a futile pursuit.*

***Ecclesiastes 1:15: Declares,***

*What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted.*

Some commentators have taken this 'crookedness' as a reference to mankind's sinfulness, but this is far too narrow a definition. Rather, Solomon has 'all that is done

under heaven’ in view. All that is done under heaven, everything under the sun, is crooked.

Consider then the futility of Solomon’s experiment, ‘What is crooked *cannot* be made straight’. Solomon may see, but he is powerless to intervene. Also consider the futility of Solomon’s efforts to understand (through the application of his God-given wisdom), ‘what is lacking cannot be counted’. Solomon observes the way things are with incredible accuracy and wisdom and yet he is unable to change this world and he is unable to fully understand *why* things are this way. The great religion of our day is the cult of self-help. Newspapers, magazines, daytime TV, life coaches and bookstores are full of advice on how to improve our circumstances underpinned with platitudes that urge us to look within and release the hero, the champion, inside us. This affects the way that we see ourselves and view our circumstances.

You may be a friend or visitor listening to this message, and you may believe that your circumstances are the big issue, the big problem preventing you from finding real fulfillment. You may believe that if only you could discipline yourself, if only you could allow positive thinking, self-actualization, inner peace, or whatever, to take hold then surely you would be able to triumph over your circumstances.

Sadly, this drive to realize a hidden potential has seeped into the fringes of Evangelicalism and so we see super-churches preaching a message and promoting a gospel which does not substantially differ from what we hear on radio. Solomon agrees that life is fractured and that this world has gone badly wrong. There is no encouragement, however, to look within and find the hidden ‘me’ because we are helpless to rectify our situation.

### ***Ecclesiastes 1:16-18***

*<sup>16</sup>I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” <sup>17</sup>And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.*

*<sup>18</sup>For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.* The point is this, Solomon is among the greatest and wisest of men ever to have lived and yet he is unable to find a solution to the meaninglessness of life under the sun and he is unable to find a remedy to the human condition.

The result of this is that, his efforts to understand result in greater sorrow and frustration, ‘in much wisdom is much vexation’. The truth is that the book of

Ecclesiastes, when understood properly, should cause us to feel the weight of this fallen/Broken world and this should cause us to feel sorrowful.

### **Looking beyond the me**

This seems to be an incredibly pessimistic view of life if it were not for the clue hidden in verse 13, '*It is an unhappy business that God has given...*' I know, for some of us, it is difficult for us to accept that God permits and even ordains famine, war, sickness, disaster and even the persecution of believers, but whether we like it or not, that is the truth.

The result of understanding that God *gives* us this unhappy business is that we know God is fully and completely in control. Furthermore, the believer knows that this *giving* must be in accordance with his divine nature and character: this means that for the believer, this world, our struggles and even our sufferings are all, ultimately, intended for our good (**Romans 8:28**).

But more than this, for the believer, the call is to look outside ourselves for the solution and end to this futility and sorrow. We are not the solution and Solomon is not the solution. Rather we look to one greater than Solomon, one who is outside this sin-corrupted fallen creation, who nonetheless, steps inside his creation to bring rescue,

### **John 1:14**

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. And this God-man, Jesus Christ, felt the weight of the fall, he felt the sorrow of all that it means to be a man and all that it is to experience life under the sun,*

*In Isaiah 53:4-6, he declared,*

*<sup>4</sup> Surely, he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—everyone—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.* This changes everything, but not, perhaps, in the way we might expect. Yes, Christ suffers for our sake and, yes, he bears our sorrows and our transgressions, but this does not mean that believers are no longer subject to the consequences of this fallen world.

We still become sick, we still suffer, and we still feel sorrow. Indeed, there is absolutely a sense in which the Christian life is the best life. We see the world and we see the fate of those who reject Christ. This explains the Apostle Paul's 'great sorrow and

unceasing anguish' for the sake of his kinsmen, his fellow Jews, who had rejected Jesus Christ (**Romans 9:1**).

Some of us feel this way as we see our loved ones turn. This explains the Apostle Paul's 'great sorrow and unceasing anguish' for the sake of his kinsmen, his fellow Jews, who had rejected Jesus Christ (**Romans 9:1**). away from Christ and make bad decision after bad decision. And yet, the Christian life is a life of incredible joy.

How can this be? Again, because we know that this 'unhappy business' is given by God. We know that he has cursed this fallen world to futility, but that this curse is lifted and removed in Christ Jesus. We have hope, therefore, that Christ will return to this earth and make all things new. We have hope and our abounding joy is grounded upon this hope.

### **Romans 8:20-21**

*<sup>20</sup>For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup>that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We believers are not pessimists, but we are realists; we see the world as it is, but we have a sure hope that things will not always be this way.*

We know that what is crooked will be made straight and that will be achieved by our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. (For this He has promised (**Mark 16:15-16**). This is the gospel; heaven invades earth and God becomes flesh; God experiences and lives life under the sun. God feels the futility of this life; he was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

He is the solution to the problem; he is the one who brings heavenly wisdom, and he is the one who bids us to come to him because he has tasted this life. He bids us come because only He can rescue and bring relief,

### **CONCLUSION**

#### ***The scripture declared in Hebrews 4:14-16***

*<sup>14</sup>Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*

*<sup>15</sup>For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup>*

*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

**Isaiah 41:10** - *Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.' NKJV*