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Death Renders Wisdom and Folly Pointless

Ecclesiastes 2: 11-17

Death renders wisdom pointless DIG: Does either wisdom or foolishness have an answer to the search for something final? What paradox does the Teacher find in pleasure? What great projects does he undertake? What desires were they meant to satisfy? During these projects, what was the Teacher's relation to wisdom? Was it under the sun or over the sun?

REFLECT: What is the most important project you have undertaken in the last year? How do you measure your success in that? Do you regard death as the final tragedy or the final triumph? Is the death of the fool different than the wise? How can you prepare yourself for your death? How does this passage help you to focus on the truly important things in life?

Solomon recognized, at long last, that the only life worth living is a life above the sun.

With the characteristic phrase: **I decided to look more carefully, the Teacher** changes the subject. **He** turns from the topic of **pleasure** to the topic of **wisdom** and **foolishness** once again (**to see link click Ce - Wisdom is Pointless**). **He** claims that if **he, the king**, could not find meaning or significance in life **under the sun**, then no one could. **For what can the man who succeeds the king do, except what has already been done (2:11-12)?**

Solomon's initial impression is not surprising for a Hebrew **wisdom** teacher: **I saw that wisdom is more useful than foolishness, just as light is more useful than darkness.** This seems obvious, but **the Teacher** is setting **his** reader up for a surprising reversal that takes place in the verses that follow. **The wise man has eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness (2:13-14a).** **Wise** people walk around with a clear head in a supposedly well-lit room; but **fools** walk around as if blind. The analogy is to life. **Wise** people can function in the world, but **the fool** keeps stumbling over obstacles.

The second half of the verse introduces a surprising reversal. So far, **the Teacher** has said

nothing startling, but now **he** introduces the idea of a common destiny: **Yet the same fate awaits them all (2:14b)**. That **fate** is **death**, and it comes to **the wise** and **the fool** alike, thus rendering **wisdom** pointless in the long run.²⁵⁴



The inevitability of **death** makes the quest for **wisdom** seem **pointless**, for **death** is the great leveler. **So I said to myself, "If the same thing happens to the fool as to me, then what did I gain by being wise?" and I thought to myself, "This too is pointless (2:15)**. It is important to understand that **the Teacher** realized this *after his* pursuit for **wisdom**, *not* before. The grass looks greener from the other side of the fence.²⁵⁵ Thus, the comparison of **wisdom** and **foolishness** is simple, but the final assessment is shattering.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** great love that not only paid our penalty for sin, but also rewards those who love **You** with eternal joy and peace! With an attitude to glorify **God** in our life, all of life's problems and trials can be seen as helping us being conformed into **Your** likeness. The problems of earth will soon be over and if we live for **You God**, loving **You** and desiring to please **You** in all we do, then soon will come the joy of an eternal home in heaven with **You**. **Therefore we do not lose heart. Though our outward man is decaying, yet our inward man is renewed day by day. For our trouble, light and momentary, is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, as we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen. For what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal (Second Corinthians 4:16-18)**. It is a joy to lift our eyes to **You** and focus on how to please **You**. In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

For the first time in the book, but by no means the last, the fact of **death** brings **Solomon's** quest to a screeching halt. **For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered, inasmuch as in the times to come, everything will long ago have been**

forgotten. The wise man, no less than the fool, must die” (2:16). Everything in our being may tell us that wisdom is not equal with **folly**, nor goodness with evil; but no matter. If **death** is the end of the road, the contention that there is nothing to choose between them will get the last word. The choices that we positively know to be significant will be brushed aside as finally irrelevant.²⁵⁶

The Teacher drew a tragic conclusion from what **he** had seen. **So I hated life**, suggesting that everyone’s life is worth **hating**. **Solomon** wasn’t the first person to express such despair in the TaNaKh (see **2 Samuel 17:23**, and **Ahithophel’s** suicide). It should be noted that this section simply says that **life** is better than **death**, no one is suggesting that **the king** goes so far as to advocate suicide. But as **he** looked back on **his** life, **Solomon** concluded that **the work done under the sun caused me only sorrow, everything** seems so **pointless**.²⁵⁷ If, **he** concluded, it doesn’t ultimately make any difference how one lives and if there is nothing ultimately worthwhile to do, then all of life and its accomplishments are **pointless, like chasing the wind (2:17)**.

At the end of **his** life, **King Solomon** realized that living life **under the sun**, cutting **God** out of the picture, in **his** own **wisdom** and in **his** foolishness, was utterly **pointless**. In a sense, it wasn’t really a life worth living, a life squandered **chasing after the wind**; because **he** recognized, at long last, that the only life worth living is a life **over the sun**. A life dedicated to **ADONAI**. And if **Paul** was going to be **a fool**, it would be **a fool for the LORD**.

Many people boast in a worldly way, under the sun, the way of human achievement, **the way** of power and prestige, and even spiritual experiences, in terms which do not take into account what is pleasing to **God**. It was because **Paul’s opponents** in **Corinth** had **boasted in a worldly way**, and because **his** converts had been won over by such **boasting**, that **Paul** felt it necessary to indulge in **it** also for **their** sakes, saying: **I too will boast this way (2 Cor 11:18)**, even though **he** was painfully aware that such **boasting** was pure **folly**.²⁵⁸

If **the Corinthians** would not put up with **Paul** when **he** was **wise** and spoke according to **the Lord**, then, **Paul** scoffed, perhaps **they** would listen to **him** when **he** acted **the fool** and **boasted** in the same manner as **the false apostles they** so admired. Ironically **he** appealed to **their** extraordinary tolerance, saying: **For since you yourselves are so wise, you gladly put up with fools (2 Cor 11:19)**! That statement is similar to **First Corinthians 4:10a**, where **he** said: **We are weak in Messiah, but you are strong!** Things haven’t changed much in **Corinth** since **Paul** wrote those words. But neither had **God’s** response to

the wisdom of the world. He will destroy **the wisdom of the wise** and make **the wisdom of the world** look **foolish**. Here, **Paul** destroys the so-called **wisdom of the wise** by embracing **it himself** and in that process, showing it to be **the folly of a fool**. But even after **Paul** descended to the level of **his rivals** in **boasting**, **he** transcended **them. He** would **boast** about visible things. What was visible, however, pointed to **his weaknesses** - part of the problem as far as **the Corinthians** were concerned. But, **boasting in his weakness** allowed **him** to talk about **God's** grace.²⁵⁹

Though the grace of **ADONAI** is evident throughout our whole lives as believers, it is especially so when we come to **die**. Faith has its great work to do last, to help believers finish well, to **die to the Lord**, so as to honor **Him**, by patience, hope and joy - so as to leave a witness of the truth of **God's** Word and the excellency of **His** ways behind us. **God** is glorified when **His people** leave this world with **their** flag flying at full mast. If anyone should **die** triumphantly it should be the believer. When **the Ruach** triumphs over the flesh, when this world is consciously and gladly left behind for heaven, when there's anticipation in the soul and the glory in the eyes as we enter into the presence of **the Lord** - then we're **dying** as pleasing unto **Him**.