

IT IS ALL VANITY ECCLESIASTES CH. 1 IN PERSPECTIVE

In a movie from the early nineties titled 'Reality Bites', an incredibly bright philosophy major who attends Baylor University uses his intelligence to dodge responsibility and his wit to charm the people around him. At one point he tells the main character whom he is smitten with "there's no point to any of this. It's all just a random lottery of meaningless tragedy and a series of near escapes. So I take pleasure in the details, a quarter pounder with cheese, those are good, the sky about ten minutes before it starts to rain, the moment when your laughter becomes a cackle and I sit back, smoke my Camel Straights and I ride my own melt."

As I read the first chapter of Ecclesiastes, this movie moment almost immediately came to my mind. I imagine King Solomon, in the twilight of his years, standing on the upper edge of the temple that he built with precise detail and skill looking out over his land completely unimpressed with his immense earthly acquisitions. He has taken the hand of some 700 wives, built a vast empire on the back of his dad David, and raised three children. He has the knowledge that he is the wisest man in all the land, but even that knowledge can only do so much when you are driven by lust and greed. It brings to mind the instance when a friend of Socrates (399 BC) went to visit the oracle and inquired as to who was the wisest of all men. The oracle responded with "your friend Socrates" so he ran back to tell Socrates what the oracle had told him to which Socrates responded "if I am the wisest of all men then it is simply because I admit that I know nothing." He then went about asking questions of men trying to prove the oracle wrong (considering that the oracle at Delphi was a sacred shrine this was considered blasphemy and eventually led to his death, but that is a completely different story).

Solomon was raised by a father who was a sinful man but had a heart that longed for the Lord and who passed that along to Solomon. So Solomon was raised with a relationship with God, blessings from God, both spiritual and worldly, and when posed with the opportunity to acquire whatever he desired he chose wisdom from God. He had a peaceful kingdom, admiration from those around him, including the queen of Sheba, who was likely from present day Yemen. This was a man who longed for nothing from the time of his birth to the time of his passing and has hit a point that all of it seems to be completely irrelevant. It is not necessarily a lack of appreciation, inasmuch as it is a time of melancholy for the wise and wealthy king, a characteristic that takes hold of all of us at least once in our lifetime.

He laments that we work tirelessly but at the end of the day we will die and it will have meant nothing. Children are born, the elderly pass away but regardless of which happens the earth keeps spinning on its axis. We are not the only ones that work however, the sun goes up and down continuously, the wind blows to and fro without ceasing and the waters flow to a sea that can never get enough, much like our wants and desires. There is nothing new or special to anything that has happened or will happen. What has been has been, what will be will be, and we are arrogantly presumptuous to believe that we have anything new to contribute. We will continue to make mistakes and fail to appreciate the countless blessings of our Creator because our memories as well as our attention span is short.

Solomon goes on to say that while he prayed to God for wisdom, that wisdom has been a burden. He has searched for the process of things, how things work, why things do what they do, why men do what they do, and it is all for nothing because at the end of the day it will all pass away. God's revelation and authority is the final authority and we are fools to think that we can straighten what he has curved or take away from what he has done. He continues that while he has vast knowledge there is a heavy burden that accompanies it because he has the wisdom to recognize all of these aforementioned things. Much like the prophets and patriarchs, he has been given wisdom and revelation from God that has allowed him to see the folly of men and the true nature of their hearts (including his own) and it is something that torments him much like it did the prophet Jeremiah. He longed for great wisdom and it was given, but he cries that sometimes ignorance is bliss and can be our best defense. The wiser one becomes the more he sees the fault in his ways and the sinful nature that accompanies each day showing him just how lowly he is compared to the wonderful and glorious God that we take for granted.

As Solomon goes on to ponder the uselessness of his earthly wisdom, acquisitions and pleasure (knowing that one day he will die and all of this will be passed on to another who may or may not squander it, rendering it useless) he knows in his heart just as we know that there is a wisdom and a kingdom that we will acquire that will never pass away. Nice homes, vehicles, coffee, a vast understanding of the world around us, and the 60 hour work weeks will amount to nothing one day. We will grow old and die. What will amount to something is not what we work for on this earth but what we achieve in terms of our eternal salvation. When we think of Abraham and Moses there is no need to be impressed by their vast fortunes or matriculation in a palace, it was the everlasting knowledge of God that they passed on to those around them that truly meant something.

In John 1:46 Nathaniel asks, "can anything good come out of Nazareth?" because he was so focused on the temporal things of this world that what God had to offer outside of material and physical blessings was not a part of his mindset. Out of Nazareth comes the savior that redeems our souls. In Matthew 28 Jesus told us what we need to do with our lives. It had nothing to do with college degrees, building homes, conquering nations, or doing what we can to ensure that we enjoy each and every moment that we are alive. I do not deny that our Savior wants us to live happily and comfortably but we must certainly keep these things in perspective. While we go about our temporal lives we must take the time to multitask lest we learn that all we did was in vain. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even until the end of the age."

We must make disciples and unless those around us know that we are disciples that can be a difficult task. In order to accomplish this we must speak His name with praise and thanksgiving (1Thes. 5:16-18). If we do not act accordingly as a disciple then we cannot expect to make disciples of those around us. Baptism is essential for salvation for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit, as sin cannot be in the presence of God. Therefore that sin must be washed away, just as the water did with Noah and Moses. If ones sin has not been washed away then it is next to impossible to live eternally in the presence of God. It is worth noting that He is God and He can save whomever He chooses but if it weren't essential then Christ likely would not have been baptized and given it as a command before He left to sit at the right Hand of God. In order to teach what Christ has commanded us we must open scripture. John 1:1 tells us that Christ is the Word therefore every word that we read

from Genesis to Revelation is of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit and is essential for our salvation. To be curt, if you do not open your Bible then you are highly unlikely to be a disciple and even less likely to teach others to observe all that Christ has commanded. These things are the will of God.

This is the wisdom that Solomon desired and ached for. Not the wisdom to be a great man and king but the wisdom to know the will of God. Although he didn't always follow that will, he never forgot what it was and continuously sought after it. I am quite certain that if my life were documented the way his was it would be equally troubling and telling but hopefully with the same outcome. I believe that Solomon found his way to Heaven because like his dad before him he had a love for God that could not be denied. He had faults and failures just like me, he sometimes had a bad attitude and felt sorry for himself but at the end of the day there was a love for God that is worthy of emulation.