

# Ecclesiastes 1:12–2:26

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Hi, my name is George Sinclair. I'm the lead pastor of Church of the Messiah.

! It is wonderful that you would like to check out some of the sermons done by Church of the Messiah, either by myself or some of the others. Listen, just a couple of things. First of all, would you pray for us that we will open God's Word well to His glory and for the good of people like yourself?

The second thing is, if you aren't connected to a church and if you are a Christian, we really, I would really like to encourage you to find a good local church where they believe the Bible, they preach the gospel, and if you have some trouble finding that, send us an email. We will do what we can to help connect you with a good local church wherever you are. And if you're a non-Christian, checking us out, we're really, really, really glad you're doing that. Don't hesitate to send us questions. It helps me actually to know, as I'm preaching, how to deal with the types of things that you're really struggling with. So God bless.

Father, Father, you know how impatient we are, how quick we are to pass judgments, how easily we are distracted. You know, Father, that sometimes we are impatient with your Word because it doesn't just sort of seem to be easily digestible for us. But Father, we thank you that you are wise, and we acknowledge before you that we are not. And you and your wisdom, Father, have revealed truth to us that we need to ponder, truths that become like pebbles in our shoe that irritate us and cause us to reflect more.

So Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would bring your Word home to us. May it be like a pebble in our shoe that stays with us and prods us to think. It can't go away. And Father, we know that in your Word, it's always to bring us to yourself. So do that by the power of your Holy Spirit. And we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen. Please be seated.

[ 2 : 1 9 ]     Now, sometimes when ministers speak, we say something and it ends up for, I cause people to go down a whole train of thought or inflame passions, which isn't the intent. And I thought hard about whether my opening analogy was going to do that, but I think I'm going to still do it. And that is the death of the conservative activist Charlie Kirk this week has been very shocking to many people, and has been very upsetting to many people. And so I'm not doing this to create some type of political turmoil or anything like that, even my next comments, which could do so. I decided on Friday morning, actually Thursday night, that I would do a little bit of a sociological research.

You know, I spend time in coffee shops working on my sermons and doing other types of work. And I decided I would ask, and I would, you know, just try to make it very calm, how the effect of Charlie Kirk, what they thought about it, or whether it affected them. And I tell them, I'm just doing some, I'm just trying to figure out what's going on. And it's not surprising, given that I work in a variety of contexts with a variety of people. Like, I got the whole range. I got one person, maybe some of you, who had never heard of Charlie Kirk before he died. And all they knew is what the news reports had to say. And it was just, I mean, it was still shocking to them. A 31-year-old man cut down so young in front of his wife and a three-year-old and an 18-month-old. I met several people who told me that the universe was a net positive for the universe for him to die. And they said it without any particular rancor, and they said it in a loud enough voice that they knew they were in, they thought they were in a comfortable environment that they could say that and not have to worry about people being upset or shocked. And I think I didn't express any particular reaction to it. And then I met others who said it was really heavy on their heart. I talked to one person who said they had to fight back tears most of Wednesday because of him being struck down. Now, I mention all of that because, you know, those of you who know me and the church, Daniel Avitan and I made a decision we were going to go through the Book of Ecclesiastes. That decision was made months and months and months ago. And I divided the book up in terms of preaching units and the Sundays and everything. That was all done months ago. But for those of you who are struck by the death of Charlie Kirk, 31 years old, in front of his wife and children, a completely shocking thing. And it makes you just ponder all sorts of things. The state of discourse in the United States in particular, but also Canada, the shortness and uncertainty of life. The Bible text that we're looking at today is actually very appropriate. It doesn't sound like it at first, but it's very, very appropriate. It talks about the shortness of life and it talks about death. And so we're going to look at it. So if you get out your Bibles, it would be a great help. We're going to be looking at Ecclesiastes chapter 1, verses 12 to the end of chapter 2. It's a long text. Once again, we have bought these scripture journal books, booklets. It has the book of Ecclesiastes, a nice size print on one side, an empty page on the other. And it's designed for you to take notes, ask questions. And there's still some there if you want to get one. But if you have your Bible, let's read it and see what it is that the Bible has to say.

And it begins like this. Chapter 1, verse 12, or page 8, if you're using these booklets. I, the preacher, have been king over Israel and Jerusalem. And just sort of pause there. This is a bit of a return to what was said at the very beginning of the book. And I just want to make it clear. Scholars debate whether or not it was Solomon. I'm fine with it being Solomon. I have nothing against it being Solomon. But scholars of good conscience debate one way or the other.

This week in particular, it's very good to read it as if it was Solomon talking. And the main point of it, and you'll really see that this week in the things that he goes through, is as I shared last week, it's the thought experiments he's going to go through. Basically, in some ways, this is like a big picture autobiography of his whole quest to try to figure out the, you know, life's meaning and what human beings are and what satisfaction is and how you should live. They're very, very important perennial questions. And it's really interesting to think that if Solomon did write it, these are questions that people have been asking for over 3,000 years. And we're getting the fruit of his wisdom. And the main thing is that Solomon had the financial resources, the heritage, the political position, the looks, everything, that at no point in time could he ever say, but if I only had, you know, I could say that, but if I only had an extra \$10,000, if I only had this, if I only had that.

And you know, and so that's a really, it's a constant aspect of human thought. If I only had, life would be better. And Solomon can't say that. That's what you have to keep in the back of your mind as you're reading through this sort of autobiography or self-reporting of his quests. In fact, he's going to report three quests. And the first quest is the most general. And by the way, it's a quest, not a journey. The difference between a quest and a journey is this. You can see it, the Lord of the Rings is a quest. And at the end of the quest, Frodo is completely changed.

[ 8 : 08 ] You know, we go on a journey, we get some t-shirts, maybe we get a brand new tattoo, get a whole pile of Instagram selfies. And then we come back and we're fundamentally the same person, other than we might be more full of ourselves because of all the fantastic things we've done.

But a quest is something that you get changes you at the end of it. And that's, he's giving you his quest. And here's the most general, verse 13. And I applied my heart, and by the way, heart is the center of everything. So when he says he applies his heart, it means he's using his mind, his imagination, he's using his emotions, he's using his affections, he's using his will. That the heart is where all of those things emerge from. And so he says, I applied my heart, the very depths and all my powers, to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It means he's going to be being pretty systematic about it. He's not just going to be, you know, willy-nilly. He's pretty systematic about trying to think it through. Verse 13 again, and I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom, under heaven. And I'll explain what that means in a moment. And here's what he says, it is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man, to human beings, to be busy with. I have seen that everything that is done under the sun, I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. So just before we go any further, I'm going to explain what some of those things mean. And one of the things you can pray for me about, by the way, is that every week the word vanity of vanities is going to come out. And I can't assume that this is like a university lecture, you're all taking notes, there's going to be an exam at the end.

So I only have to explain that phrase once, because you know, you need to know it, otherwise you're going to fail the court. No, that's not that. I need to, so how much I repeat, that's one of the things you can just pray for, just the right amount so you don't get bored and tune out, but not, just enough so it keeps you remembering, but not so much that it bores you.

But here's the thing about the book as a whole. It is a wisdom book. It is a book that's designed to be pondered. It's desired, it is like when I said in my prayers, God using certain phrases and sayings to put pebbles in your shoe, that every time you take a step you feel the pebble and you just can't get rid of it, and it's sort of always there so you're thinking about it. And it's designed, another way to put it is, another analogy is, it's designed for you to be like a cow chewing the cud, and that it's designed to be pondered over and to look for different levels. But here's another thing about why it's so depressing sounding, is that the whole book is a work of subversive fulfillment. I know two big words, subversive fulfillment. And what that means is he's going to disillusion you and disillusion you and disillusion you and disillusion you, and he's going to be relentless in disillusioning you so you can actually have real hope.

So in other words, he subverts the way you think, he subverts and undermines the normal types of ways you evaluate your life and get meaning and all of that. But he does that not so he can say at the end, ha ha ha ha, you know, I'm way smarter than you, go off and be depressed. And it's not like that at all.

[ 11 : 39 ] He's not like just an arrogant arguer that I've met quite a few over my years. The whole point is that if you get all of the things, all the false hopes, all of the illusions that you hope in, if they are stripped away, he strips it away so you can have real hope. And that the deep longings and yearnings of your heart, you can start to see how they're actually fulfilled. Okay, that's what he's doing. And so, you know, under the sun and under the heavens are the same type of phrase. He's trying to, you know, to use in a Canadian example, it would be those who say that life is one dang thing after another and then you die. And so sometimes we say that, but that's a very uncomfortable truth to Canadians. And so we, we distract ourselves, we try to forget it, we come up with illusions that that's not true. It's looking at the world as if the triune God fundamentally isn't at work and you're left with your own religions, your own spiritualities, your own quests, all of that stuff. And that's what it means.

But the big question is, what's not under the sun? What is beyond or above under the sun or under the heaven? That's the big, that's the riddle. That's what he wants you to think about.

And, and vanity is him describing what human beings are. And it literally means vapor. And as I'm going to say it again, because it's such, you know, that they wrote this in the tropics, so they wouldn't have had this as an analogy, but it's a perfect analogy. The only time that we're really conscious of the fact that we're breathing, I mean, we're always aware that we're breathing, but that there's breath coming out of us is when it's minus 20 outside and you can see your breath.

So seeing your breath, that's what's being described here. That's, that's vapor. That's the thing, the word translated as vanity. It's describing that human beings are like vapor that you can see on a minus 20 day coming out of your mouth, just there for a moment, and then it's gone.

Can't be, you could, you can't try to hold it together. It's just gone. See, once again, you can see how this is very relevant to thinking a little bit about what's just happened with, with Charlie Kirk. It's just something which is forced, you know, me, I'm not saying a hundred percent of the, of the population. You know, some people have been jubilant over it, and I don't say that for you to be angry. Being angry about that accomplishes absolutely nothing and isn't Christian.

[ 14 : 00 ] Being angry is not something that furthers the righteousness of God, that type of anger. But it, it does bring out to us just, we could die at any moment. It's really brought home to, I don't know what the percentage of North Americans, but for many, many people, it really brings it home to us. How short life can be. And so that the word vanity, on one hand, when you hear it all the way through, you, sometimes you need to think of it primarily as vapor, and sometimes you need to think of it as literally as vanity. Because the, the thing about human beings is that I'm vapor. I think I described it last week that human beings are vapor with pretensions. Another way to describe it is, I am vapor with arrogance and illusion that think I am something more like an eternal being.

I think that I can cause eternal things to be, and transcendent things to be. And I tell myself these stories. And to tell yourself these stories, to deny that you're vapor, but to think that you're somehow more eternal and more transcendent and can cause things, that's vanity. It's looking at yourself with great pride. And an attempt to act on that is a vain pursuit, because it just can't happen.

And we're going to see that as the rest of the story goes on. And, and then this phrase, verse 15, what is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. Sometime in the future, I'd like to do a whole sermon just on that. It's very profound insight, and it helps to illustrate things.

What is crooked that cannot be straightened? That's just, I mean, the fact of the matter is, I mean, some of you work in businesses, some of you work in art, some of you work in the civil service, and all of your plans, they, you know, they're pretty good plans, but there's something in them that just don't work the way they're supposed to, and it's intractable. It all looked good on paper, but then when it gets rolled out, it might be pretty effective, but there's things in it that just don't work. And it's also describing a little bit about human nature. The problem with human nature is that it's not that everything that we human beings is bad, but there's something in our mind that's just not perfectly straight. It, it, it's bent somehow, and it misses its target. The same with heart, this, our heart, our love, our will, and everything. Like, even when we do a really, really good thing, there's something in it which is a little bit of selfishness, or a little bit of hurt, or a little bit of pride, and it just can't seem to be gotten rid of. So that's one of the many reasons why our pursuits are vain. Not only that we're vapor, but it's just not going to work. And the other reason that things are vain, and that we have this problem of arrogance, is how many times in our life, I mean, the whole thing about the problem of evil, which I'm not going to talk about right now, is that God should do this if he has this power. And how many times in people's lives do we think that if, you know, if, if, if, uh, you know, this is the missing piece that I absolutely need, and I don't know why the universe isn't giving it to me, and I don't know why I'm not getting it, and if I could just get it, I mean, part of the whole operating philosophy of much of our culture is only I know the authentic me, and only I know though that picture of what the authentic me is, and I, only I know those pieces in the puzzle that need to be given to me, or attained by me, and, and, and given to me so I can complete this perfect picture of who I am, and I need to be on this quest, and you folks need to admire me for it, and applaud me for it, and that's what describes it. That I know the picture, the puzzle piece, and if I can just get these few pieces and put them together, and what this saying is, no you don't. You get a bag of puzzle pieces, you don't even know if that bag of puzzle pieces is one puzzle, two puzzles, five puzzles, or seven puzzles. You don't know if it's something like a triptych, you know, those stained glass and other images where you have, you know, something like this, you have one, and then another, and that, you don't know if you have, you, if you have seven puzzle pieces in there, and it's describing some type of journey, you don't know if you have one big piece, you don't know if you're missing one piece, 25 pieces, or 3,000 pieces. That's the human condition.

It's very profound. How do we know that God should do these things if he's all-powerful? That implies that we understand the entire universe, we know all the puzzle pieces, we can put all the puzzle pieces together, and there's just these two or three things which are missing that God should do if God is God, but no, we don't know any of that stuff. We don't. It's vanity. I'm vain, because I do it too.

[18:33] By the way, all of these things, these aren't us versus us texts, this is a text trying to get to describe a fundamental human problem, and if you're outside the Christian faith watching this, I want to tell you some shocking thing that Christians forget all the time, that we're human beings, and we have the normal human problems of everybody else, and we're not better than other people just because we're Christians. So we'll go a bit quicker as we go on.

Look at verse 16. This is sort of giving the general quest. 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, and I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly.

I perceived this also as but a striving after wind. Go try to chase the wind down and gather it up. It can't happen. It doesn't work. You just can't do it. Just can't. And it's setting up something which he's going to in a sense double click on and expand in the next thing about wisdom and folly, and that I'll talk about that in a moment. And then he ends with verse 18, for in much wisdom is much vexation. And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. In my talking this week I know of I think about three people or four people who saw the full video of Charlie Kirk being shot and they wish they could unsee it. With more wisdom and more knowledge comes more vexation and unhappiness.

Now we get it blown up a little bit or more detail about this general search. Verse chapter 2, verse 1, I said in my heart, that's within myself, come now I will test you with pleasure. Enjoy yourself. But behold, this also was vanity. It's either vaporous, it just comes and goes, or it's something which is just pretensions. I said of laughter, verse 2, it is mad and of pleasure, what use is it? I search with my heart how to cheer my body with wine, my heart still guiding me with wisdom and how to lay hold on folly till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life. Just sort of pause here. First of all, this quest list isn't, you can go ahead and do this. This is an X-rated and an, this is an R-rated or triple X-rated list and a virtuous list.

He's going to talk about how I had sex with lots of women. I got drunk constantly. I did drugs. I did all sorts of bad things. This isn't just a goody two-shoe list. This is a whole list of human experience.

[ 21 : 23 ] And it's really remarkable how much it covers it. He does everything from, I use all my mind to do these things. He's going to describe intellectual and pursuits like architecture, which it requires both great intellectual skills and creativity and imagination. And so it's a whole list of endeavors involve creativity, imagination, careful thinking, great skill. And it's also going to be a search request that says maybe the mind is the problem. And what happens if I get rid of the mind and see what's on the other side of what the mind withholds? And this is the whole, that's the history.

These are all the whole history of mankind's search and humankind's search for things. Everything from, you know, from drugs, from frenzies, from alcohol abuse, from, you know, dancing and mantras and chanting and stopping your mind and quietening your, all and everything from using your mind. It's a whole, whole gamut of things. It's using psychedelics. It's, it's going into altered states of consciousness. It's, it's sharpening your consciousness. Verse four, I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I mean, what's a constant vanity project for athletes and, and, and musicians and, and, and movie stars is to have their own vineyard with their own wines named after themselves.

This is just today's news. This isn't, this is today. Verse five, I made myself gardens and parks and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the, the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves. Remember, this is not a, this isn't saying, go ahead and do these. I'm only pursuing good things. He pursues evil things.

What is one of the persistent ideas that will give satisfaction? Absolute power over people. It might not be yours. Hopefully it isn't. But there is a perennial attraction to power, the lust for power. Verse seven continues, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem. I gathered for myself silver and gold, the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers. How many people have thought of music as a source of ultimate meaning? Both men and women, and many concubines. A concubine is a woman that you're not married to that you can have sex with. That's what it said. That's the good life.

These are all the different paths to the good life. The delight of the sons of man. Verse nine, so I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

[ 24 : 06 ] And others always, even when he was losing his mind in altered states of consciousness, part of him was conscious that there was part of him there observing. And in verse 10, and whatever my eyes desired, I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil. And this was the reward for all my toil. Now just a couple of things. Actually, I'll read verse 11 and I'll comment. Then I considered that all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity, all was vapor, and a striving after wind. And there was nothing to be gained under the sun. Now, sort of what's going on there.

The word translated here as reward is going to be an important thing in the rest of it. And it's one of those words which is impossible to really translate into English. That's what I gather from the Hebrew, the commentaries on the Hebrew. And the literal word is portion. And by the way, when he says it's my reward, one of the things in this whole section is that he keeps replacing it's not...

It's so repetitive in the original language, it's not usually repeated in the English, because it's off-putting for English grammar. But myself, myself, myself, myself, myself, for myself, for myself, for myself, for myself, for myself, for myself. And the reward is a portion.

And the question which you're going to eventually see is where that reward comes from. Is it a reward that he earns? Or is there a portion, that's the literal word, that comes to him from somewhere else?

That's going to be another one of the riddles throughout it all. And what you see is that a lot of these things gave him pleasure, and that was something that he understood as a portion that came to him. But the gain word here, that's the big question. It shows the fact that we want something more out of experience and out of our work. It's not just enough to have pleasure. We want something more from it. We want something that is going to make us, or that we have created after us, that will point back to us, that is transcendent, that is eternal, that is constant, that is permanent. And we want these projects and these accomplishments to be something that comes from us, so that even if we've died, that in the future people keep looking back and seeing us. And that's this whole word of gain. That's what we want. Why is it that we want something like that? And why is it that when it doesn't happen, it bothers us? And these are the questions the writer Solomon is going to keep putting in our face.

[ 27 : 00 ] And it continues now in another version in verse 12. And now it's going to be something which is a bit more spiritual. It's not as obvious because of the imagery, but look at verse 12. So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly, for what can the man or the woman do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.

Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness.

In other words, what he's saying here is, it's not going to be gain. We're going to see that in a moment. But he realizes, see here's one of the things which is about him, is he's not a nihilist. He's not a cynic.

And he's not a Buddhist. He's going to acknowledge that there are some things better than others, and that pleasure is something good. But it isn't good enough for what he wants.

There's something better about wisdom than foolishness. There's something better about light than darkness. But it's not enough for what he wants, what he's in a sense lusting after. Verse 14, the wise person has his eyes in the head, his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived, here's the thing, here's where death comes in, and I perceived that the same event happens to all of them, the wise and the fool. And by the way, light and darkness, that's a symbolizing of a spiritual quest.

[ 28 : 28 ] And it's everything involved in a spiritual quest, whether we have it specifically like religious quest, whether it's more like what we would talk about as a spiritual but not religious quest. It's pursuit of light and darkness is everything, and that there's, you know, there's spiritual and intellectual and aesthetic and emotional light and darkness and wisdom and foolishness.

So it's everything from intellectual pursuits to spiritual to aesthetic pursuits, all those things that get wrapped together in what we would consider being religious or spiritual. And then in verse 15, then I said in my heart, what happens to the fool will also happen, will happen to me also.

Why then have I been so very wise? And I said in my heart, this also is vapor and vanity. Verse 16, for of the wise as of the fool, there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come, all will have been long forgotten how the wise dies just like the fool. And here's the words that people are shocked in the Bible. So I hated life. I hated life. I have had so many people tell me they hate their life. I hate my life. Maybe some of you here today, I hated life because what is done under the sun was grievous to me for all is vanity and striving after the wind.

I'm not asking for a show of hands, but I wouldn't be surprised if there were more than five or six people who could tell me the name of the rector of Church of the Messiah, St. Albans, before me.

I know you could, Andrew. Right? Might only be five people in the congregation or a little bit more than that, that remember who was here before me.

[ 30 : 24 ] I mean, I have to consider the fact that when I finally stepped down as the rector of Church of the Messiah, that 30 years after that, if the next rector or the rector after that or the third rector after me asked, how many people know the guy who stepped down on this date? I bet there's not more than five of you.

I mean, just to make it really crucial, verse 16, the murderer of Charlie Kirk in the state of Utah can die. There's the death penalty. And whether that takes three years or five years, and they almost definitely will not be in the same grave. One will be in Utah if he has a grave, and the other one will be in Arizona. I don't know if he's going to have a grave or he'll be cremated.

But in theory, in some time in five years, you can go to see the graves of both. Why does that make us very uncomfortable? See, what longings and yearnings of our hearts does that reveal that we have, that that makes us uncomfortable? It's an uncomfortable truth, but it's true. Well, it continues, verse 19. I have to...

Verse 18. I hated all my toil. It's more of his comment on his quest. I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool. Yet he will be the master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity, it's vapor. So I turned and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun, because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is a vanity, a vapor, and a great evil. What has a man or a woman from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest.

This also is vanity. To make it very concrete, you work really hard, you save, you're very, very disciplined, and maybe you have children of your own, maybe it's just a nephew or a niece, and you save, and you even in your retirement, you're frugal, because one of the goals in your life is that you want to leave some money and something to your children behind you, and let's say you just have one daughter, and you die, and you know, you leave a million dollars to your daughter, and then six months after you die, she marries a huckster who steals all the money from her, and how would you make, how that make you feel if you knew that in advance?



[ 33 : 27 ] I mean, one of the questions in all of this is, there's a famous, semi-famous, I hate it when I, I hate it when people say famous, and you'd never heard of it before, so I apologize when I do it. I really do, but in some circles, there's a famous line by the, the fellow who was, he committed suicide, he's a famous writer, David Foster Wallace, and he was doing a commencement address somewhere, and he told this story, which is famous in certain circles, and I think I've said it here, so some of you remember it. One day an old fish was swimming along in the water, and he comes across two younger fish swimming the opposite way, and as the old fish passes the young fish, he says to the old, the young, old fish says to the younger fish, how's the water? And the two young fish says, great. They keep swimming the old fish this way, the young feet, two fish this way, and about 50 feet past the old fish, one young fish says to the other, what's water?

You see, one of the things which this book is doing is it's making us aware of the fact of the world we actually live in without ever noticing it, and here you can puzzle for yourself over several things. Do dogs worry about gain and doing things which are eternal? The fish. Well, why is it that we live in a world which is the way the world is, and yet these things make us uncomfortable, that we will not be remembered. We will be remembered for a short period of time, but then we will be forgotten, that our accomplishments will be forgotten. Why is it that that makes us despair and feel uncomfortable?

What does that say about us as human beings? And one of the things that the whole book is going to say is the whole book is going to say that in fact what is going on is that we have a longing for something which is on the other side of under the sun. We have a longing for that, that we were made to have that connection with what is on the other side of under the sun.

And look how he concludes. It's a very important moment, and it's taken us a while to get there, and it's a bit of the beginning of the answer which he's going to want to try to give us in the whole book. And hopefully I'll just take the time. You've been very patient to look a little bit at what this means practically for us. Look at verse 24. He pauses after all of these quests, all the wine, all the women, all the wealth, all the building projects, all the creativity, all the artistic stuff, all the technical skill. Verse 24, there is nothing better for a person than he should ink, that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. Now that's a surprise.

This also I saw is from the hand of God. Joy and pleasure is a gift that comes to you from the hand of God.

[ 36 : 38 ] For apart from him, that is God, who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him, I'll explain what this means in a moment, God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and striving after wind. Not the earlier part, the striving after wind and all that's referring back to the sinner and the business of gathering and collecting. It's not referring to the 24, 25 and the first half of 26. So here's the thing, several of the things in conclusion about what the writer is saying. The first thing is this, that when we take the things that we're doing, when I take the things that I'm doing right now, and if I try to say that the whole hope of my sermon is that I'm going to do something which makes an eternal difference that I've accomplished by my own power, that will be remembered forever, that something transcended. When I put a weight on all those things, it will only lead me to despair.

Pleasure and joy and accomplishment cannot bear the weight of being something eternal and transcendent that flows from me. And it will mean I end up even losing the possible enjoyment and satisfaction what I did because I want it to accomplish this other thing and it will just crush me.

But if I take moments of joy and moments of wisdom and moments of an accomplishment in a good task well done and rather than thinking it should be a light as if it comes from me that people in the future can look down that light and see me but I realize it is a gift that has come from God and it is as if I stand in the light of the sunbeam and I look and I can see through that barrier that is between us and God and I can see God that it's something not that is for my vanity but something as an opportunity for me to look Psalm 12 eternal joy, eternal pleasure is at God's right hand.

life is not something for me it's not a set of tasks for me to master for my glory life is a gift the joy that you get from having that first cup of coffee in the morning or your cup of tea or whatever it is that is a gift that comes from God that you should relish and enjoy doesn't have to transform your life or bring your glory but it is something you can actually just sit down and enjoy all the more reason to say grace over it that walk you do this afternoon in the sunshine and there's no mosquitoes and you can enjoy the day and it is designed not for you to think how can I do so how it's so so sad that this will all go away and I'm going to die in a moment no it's an opportunity for you to pause and reflect and to look beyond the pleasure and the joy to the one who gives it to you because the fact of the matter is I am vapor that the reason I am vapor do not just completely disperse right now is completely and utterly because I am held together by the one who is beyond the sun

God holds me together and God gives gifts to his people he gives gifts to all people and the whole thing about sinners and sinlessness that's also just telling us another another very very important thing it's not saying that the task of my life is to live such a sinless life and and be so vain and so powerful that people from the future look down the glory of me to see how I've accomplished sinlessness it's for me to realize that even my sinlessness and being held together has to be a gift that comes to me undeserving and here we are completely and utterly prepared for the gospel the gospel is this good news follow the clues follow the hints follow the light look up realize that everything that is good is gift you are always going to be vapor but understand that you are vapor held together by God but here is this profound truth

[ 41 : 17 ] God sent the greatest of all gifts in the person of his son and God the son of God took into himself our human nature he took into himself vapor and so he became not two weird creatures or some type of cyborg but one person and when you look at him as man he is vapor held together by God when you look at him as as God he is God the son of God the creator and sustainer of all things but he's not two separate beings he is just one person and God the son of God came into our world as vapor and as a world of vanity and striving after the wind but without ever becoming vain or striving after the wind himself he came to be God's profound gift to understand that all life ultimately is a gift and when we put our hands in the hands of Christ and accept him as our savior and take him into himself and as he starts to form us he is going to form us in the direction of understanding that every second is a gift it's not my due it's a gift enjoy that moment as a gift but he comes and my future is not that after death because of Christ

I become another eternal being like him but I can rest in the confidence that all my learning yearnings and longings for eternity and transcendence is only given to me as a gift when I put my faith and trust in Christ and after death I am still vapor but I have this solemn promise by almighty God that for all eternity I will dwell in his presence and I will be filled with a fullness of pleasure that would unmake me on this side of the grave and that for all eternity I will be held together by the hand of God and in the love of God in Christ brothers and sisters that is the gospel promise enjoy this day enjoy this time and give thanks and praise I invite you to stand bow your heads in prayer father we give you thanks and praise that when we give our lives to Christ it is not that we change our species and all of a sudden while everybody else around us is vapor in a world that is fleeting that we somehow aren't vapor we give you thanks and praise that you give us something better you give us something better that we remain ourselves we remain vapor but we know that on this side of the grave you are the one who holds us together in your love and that in a far greater and truer and in the only possible way to fully and truly enjoy and be in the new heaven and the new earth in all eternity is that when we put our faith and trust in Christ and your Holy Spirit comes inside of us that we have your solemn and wonderful and glorious and beautiful promise that for all eternity you will hold us together in your love and that we will not live under the sun but we will live every day in the future in the full presence of your love and your beauty and your glory and that we will drink it in and be filled with joy and pleasure for all eternity and have tasks to do that are glorious and wonderful and gives you the glory and so we ask Father that you make this gospel truth more real to our heart that you would help us to die from all of our eternity and transcendence projects and that you might grant us that humble gift of enjoying the good things you give us each day and the tasks you give us to do each day that we might do them not for our glory but for your glory and for the good of others and we ask these things in the name of Jesus your Son and our Savior

Amen you