

Analysis of Ecclesiastes

by W.J. Erdman

W.J. Erdman's sermon on Ecclesiastes explores the futility of human endeavors and the search for meaning in life under the sun.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 2:24

Topics: "Ecclesiastes Study", "Christian Wisdom"

Description

W.J. Erdman preaches on the search for the Chief Good sought by the natural man through experience and observation of all things done 'Under the Sun.' The sermon is divided into two parts: Part I focuses on the prologue, the wise search, the vanities, and the resort, while Part II delves into wise conduct, the law of the Golden Mean, the problem of life unsolved, and the final conclusion on the Chief Good under the Sun.

Transcript

PART I., Chapters 1-6.

Division I., Chapters 1-2.

Division II., Chapters 3-4.

Division III., Chapters 5-6.

PART II., Chapters 7-12.

Division I., chapters 7-9:12.

Division II., chapters 9:13-12:14.

The Theme: The Chief Good Sought by the Natural Man Through Experience and Observation of all Things Done " Under the Sun."

PART I.

Division I., Chapters 1-2.

The Prologue; the Wise Search; the Vanities; the Resort.

Section 1. 1:1-11. The Reflex; the Conclusion of all.

a. The Result of the consideration of all Labor under the sun. i: 2-3.

b. In Nature is seen the symbol of the monotonous round of Man's endless toil and endeavor. 1: 4-7.

c. There is no progress under the sun; prospects are but retrospects; the present things and generations and those to come will be forgotten like the generations gone; the earth alone abides; its abiding a vexation to short lived man. 1:8-11.

Section 2. 1:12-18. Introduction: the Seeker, the Search, the Method, the Result.

a. The Seeker; a King, the wisest and richest of men. 1:12, 16. (2:9, 12, 25; 7:15, 23-25; 11:9-10.)

b. The Search; the Chief Good for the sons of men under heaven. Such search is given of God to humble and discipline. 1:13,17. (2:3, 7:25, 1:13, 3:10.)

c. The Method: a philosophic, wise experimentation and careful observation. 1:13, 14; 1:16,17. (2:3, 9; 7:23-25, 12:9-11.)

d. All is Vanity and Vexation of Spirit" and this without remedy, for all under the sun, perverse, " crooked " and defective, "wanting," remains unalterably so. 1:14-15.

e. The Result in particular; wisdom itself is but a sorrowful possession, a ' ' Vexation of Spirit." 1:16-18. (1:2-3, 2:11, 6:12, 11:8, 1:15, 3:14, 7:13).

Section 3. 2:1-11. The Result of all of the Seeker's own personal Experience in search of the Chief Good; " the whole vanity and vexation of spirit; " or " all is vapour and feeding on wind," or " choice or seeking of wind." LXX.

a. The Vanity of the lust of the flesh. 2:1-3.

b. The Vanity of the lust of the eyes. 2:4-6.

c. The Vanity of the pride of life. 2:7-8.

d. The Result thus far, " Vanity, a striving after wind;" no "profit," surplus, advantage. 2: 9-11.

Section 4. 2:12-26. Various Vanities and the Final Resort.

a. The Vanity of even Wisdom itself, though more excellent than folly, in view of death and oblivion to wise and foolish alike. 2:12-15.

b. The conclusion, therefore, that life is hateful, not worth living, for " The whole is vapour and a chasing of the wind." 2:16.

c. The hateful Vanity of work done wisely, in view of a foolish, thick-headed heir. 2:18-19.

d. The Vanity and Despair of work done wisely, in view of a recipient who never did a stroke for the portion received. 2: 20-21.

e. The Vanity of all self-denying labor under the sun. 2:22-23.

f. The Resort to the Conclusion: to enjoy the good things of life and labor, and to thank God for the " chance " and the power of enjoyment.

The Conclusion weakened by a contra diction inseparable from such self-complacent enjoyment; and the refrain of " Vanity and Vexation of Spirit," again heard. 2:24-26;

Division II., chapters 3-4.

The Result of the Observation of all Done under the Sun, in Search of the Chief Good.

Section 1. 3:1-22. The "Times" of Man; the Purpose of God; the Judgment.

a. The " times " of man under the sun, are in orderly, seasonable sequence; but not only is there no permanent outcome or profit from all their toil and trouble, but man is perplexingly ignorant of the one great unalterable purpose and work of God. He does not know how to fit, or how his little knowledge and work under the sun fit into the eternal purpose of God. 3:1-11.

b. The Resort, because of such ignorance and of the necessity of submission to the in evitable of the divine order, to the Conclusion of a joyous, serene and thankful enjoyment of good in one's labor, and to fear before God in view of the divine judgment of all the past. 3:12-15.

c. The Day of God will be long: "a time therefor every purpose and work;" and for all unjust judges under the sun; un-righted wrongs test men; and yet one " chance " of death is alike to men and beasts; in that respect there is no preeminence of man above the beast, for " all is vanity." Still, in view of all, one may calmly rejoice in the present, for there is no long future for man on earth; and when he is gone he cannot know any more what is done under the sun. 3:16-22.

Section 2. 4:1-16. Observation of various wrongs and vanities under the sun.

a. Oppressions make death and oblivion preferable to life. 4:1-3.

b. The envy of lazy fools, of the successful rich, makes success a vanity and vexation of spirit. 4:4-6.

c. The Vanity and sore travail of the labor of the lone miser, in contrast with the Benefit of Companionship. 4:7-12.

d. The Vanities of political life: its sudden reversals; its passing popularity. 4:13-16, 8:10.

Division III., Chapters 5-6.

Exhortations concerning Vanities in Religion and the Extortions of the High. The Vanities of Riches. The Height and the Depths of the Preacher's Mood. The Conclusion as to the Chief Good; its Contradiction and utter Failure.

Section 1. 5:1-9. Divine worship; human injustice.

a. The worship of God: the rebuke of the irreverent, rash and wordy. Foolish fancies make worship Vanity. The Seeker, in his mood of piousness, says " thou " to himself. 5:1-7.

b. Exhortations (" thou ") concerning the extortions of the high and the relations of the Highest thereto. 5:8-9.

Section 2. 5: 10-20. The Vanities of Wealth; the Complacent Conclusion.

a. The Vanity of the Gain and increase of Riches. 5:10-12.

b. The Vanity and sore evil of the loss of hoarded riches in an unwise venture. 5:13-17

c. The Result of Experience and Observation, thus far, is the Conclusion that "the Good that is comely," or the Good and the Beautiful, is, to enjoy the good things of life and to thank God for the power of enjoyment. And when all enjoyment is forgotten, it is still " the Good " that God gave it. 5:18-20.

Section 3. 6:1-12. The sore Contradiction and utter breakdown of the foregoing Conclusion; despair of finding the Chief Good.

a. The sore evil and vanity, common among men, contradicting and disturbing the complacent conclusion, not to be able to eat and enjoy the good things of life. 6:1-2.

b. But the exceeding vanity and worst feeding on wind is, in being rich, and having a hundred sons and a long life, and yet in life no fill of the soul, and at death no honorable burial; better never to have lived at all. 6:3-9.

c. It is seen and acknowledged that all these experiences under the sun are of man as man, of Adam, the race, utterly weak and unable to cope with the unalterable purpose and work of Him Who is mightier than man. 6:10.

The Seeker comes to an utter break down of all knowledge of what is the Good for man in all his shadow-like life of numberless vanities, 6:11-12.

PART II., Chapters 7-12.

The Chief Good Sought for in Wise Conduct. The Law of the Golden Mean. Its Application. The Problem of Life Unsolved. Wisdom the Most Desirable Resort. The Final Retrospect. The Warning. The Great Conclusion, or The Chief Good Under The Sun.

Division I., 7:1--9:12.

The law of Prudence; the Anomalies; the Resort; the fresh attempt; the final failure.

Section 1. 7:1-29. The Recovery from depths of despairful ignorance to a Philosophic Mood.

a. The balancing and the better things; the average struck. 7:1-14.

b. Things seen in days of vanity and not ended; anomalies among men; the extremes to be avoided. 7:15-18.

c. Wisdom a strength; no one perfectly righteous, not even the Preacher. 7:19-22.

d. In all the Search in the deeps of the past, in the far off and soundless, the worst thing found was the evil woman; and the final confession follows that man, the race, once created upright, is indeed fallen. 7:23-29.

SECTION 2. 8:1-15. Prudence and caution before wicked rulers. High and low, good and evil, go to the same doom of death; no golden mean, no prudence avails. The vanity of an unloved ruler. The great problem concerning righteous and wicked unsolved.

- a. Be prudent before kings. From lack of this seasonable prudence great misery comes on common men. They cannot save themselves from the common, inevitable doom of death, neither can rich rulers; and a vanity belongs to their very death; their memory is soon forgotten. " Out of sight, out of mind." 8:1-10.
- b. The assertions and recantings touching the contrarious treatment of righteous and wicked. 8:11-13.
- c. In utter discomfiture the prudent man resorts to the favorite conclusion to enjoy himself anyhow. 8:14-15.

Section 3. 8:16, 9:12. The discomfiture temporary. The final attempt to solve the problem of God" s work and human allotments. The failure and resort to enjoyment; a new contradiction.

- a. "All move to a common fate;" but any kind of life is better than oblivion; all allotments of joy and grief, love and hatred, in the hand of God, but no one knows what is before him in a world of seeming chance. " A living dog is better than a dead lion." 8:16-9:6.
- b. "See life" (9:9) in the fragrant delights of the family; eat, drink and be merry; it is the portion left; work hard for it. 9:7-10.
- c. And yet the indiscriminate allotments and unaccountable failures of life, check all expectations of sure success. The evil chance may happen to one any moment. 7:11-12.

DIVISION II., 9:13-12:14.

Recovery to the placid philosophic mood; the cautious praise of wisdom; the proverbial philosophy; the final wise admonition as to human work. The summing up; the forecast; the warning to youth; the old age and its sorrows; the great Conclusion.

Section 1. 9:13; 11:6. The philosophic mind; the wise maxims; the work of man and God.

- a. The narrative of the wisdom once seen in a city, leads to the rhythmical statements that follow. 9:13-16.
- b. The Proverbs of natural wisdom and prudence. 9:17; 10:20.
- c. Man should do his work, though all ignorant of the work. God worketh from the beginning to the end, and this the Preacher had failed to find out. 11:1-6.

Section 2. 11:7; 12:8. The final sum and forecast; the exhortation; the warning.

- a. The final sum and forecast: that however pleasant at times, life under the sun may be, all to come, like all past, will have many days of darkness, for "the whole," from childhood to old age, " is Vanity." 11:7-8.
- b. Special exhortation to childhood and youth as being themselves only vanity. A pathos of irony; a melancholy approval of enjoyment mingled with fear of coming judgment. 11: 9-10.
- c. Warnings against the evils and miseries of the old age of a vainly spent life. The Creator and Judgment to come.

The vanity of the old age of a vain life. 12:1-8.

Section 3. 12:9-14. The Epilogue or Supplement.

The last and mournful repetition of the monotonous Refrain, "Vanity of Vanities, all is Vanity," with which the book began and the old age closes, leads to the conclusion of the whole matter.

a. Praise for the Preacher. 12:9-11.

b. The Weariness of the foregoing Search and Study, and of the endless observations or books that might still be made. 12:12.

c. The Great Conclusion of man under the sun; the material for the Conclusion found during the search.

(1.) As to the relation of God to the Search, 1:13; 3:10.

(2.) As to life, 5:18; 8:15; 9:9; 12:7.

(3.) As to earthly good and enjoyment, 2:26;. 5:19; 2:24; 3:13-14; 5:19-20; 9:7-10; 6:2; 11:9.

(4.) As to future judgment, 3:15-17; 5:1-7; 7:29; 11:9; 12:13-14.

But the Chief Good seen by the Natural Man is still in the future; all is still facing a Fulfillment and a Righteousness in the Man to come from above the sun.

The Failure of man implied in the abrupt ending; preparation for salvation through it all.

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