



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Lessons from Mike Black

Ecclesiastes 2:12 – 26

Lesson 3 of 16

2007-08

"Qoheleth: The Man With A Powerful Mind "

TRANSCRIPT

This is our third lecture in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Our text tonight is beginning in chapter 2 verse 12 through verse 26. But I will first start with a comment of interest. If you are a careful student of scripture, which I know you all are, you might want to make a note (in verse 12) that this will be the last time our Teacher, our speaker, adopts the royal personage in the book. No longer will he refer to the '*king*', which he has done previously.

And now we are listening to Qoheleth, 'the man with the powerful mind', who will give us tonight his assessment of life. Beginning in verse 12;

Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king's successor do than what has already done? I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. Then I thought in my heart, "The fate of the fool will overtake me also. What then do I gain by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless." For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die.

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have

poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless.

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 2: 12-26

So tonight, we will listen to an assessment of life from this vast mind which is such a treasure. And yet he will not paint for us a very glowing review of this existence. In verses 12 through 17, he will call it a great '*frustration*' or exemplify his great *frustration*. In verses 18 through 23, he moves from frustration to his own word—'*Despair*' (vs20). And yet, he will conclude his lesson to us, verses 24 through 26, with some very wise advice. Now, let's bow for a moment before the LORD of the Word for His blessing on tonight's lesson, shall we?

Father, we're very grateful that we are here together in the communion and fellowship of the Word of God. We are grateful for the heritage of Believers Chapel: For in Your mighty hand, and wisdom, and providence, You have protected this lectern and pulpit throughout the years. From it great preaching has brought forth Your people and built them up and brought them to faith in this place. So we pray tonight that the words of our heart and the meditations of our mind, as we look at the scriptures together and as we wrestle with the thoughts of this powerful mind, would also encourage us and build us up.

Bring to faith any here tonight who might not know You, to Your glory and honor, our Lord Jesus Christ: Whom we love and Whom we serve. For He is the end for everything in all of our energy and all of our lives. In His name, we pray, Amen.

In the late 1960s a movie, *The Adventurer*, starts off with what the late Ronald Reagan would call 'one of those little tin-horned dictators'. He is lining people up and machine-gunning them against a wall; all those who wouldn't fall in line with his regime. It's at that point in the story, after we're acquainted with him, that we're introduced to the major figure. His name is Dax. He is a suave, gifted patriot. The story unfolds how this very debonair man with no money or political clout is going to unseat this dictator and his cruel regime to free the country that he loves.

First, he recruits a man of seeming good character, who will be a future leader for the land. This man, by his testimony, will bring equity and justice to the country and so Dax backs him. He backs him with money that he raises through a number of nefarious causes and circumstances; and then there are the ensuing battles that take place. In the end, Dax and his friend win.

Then, to our complete surprise and shock, as Dax is walking across one of the city's great plazas he is shot dead by a lone sniper. Just when he had won! Just when his plans for the country were coming together to celebrate this great victory!

Then in the final scene of the movie we see this young 'principled' man, (who had been supported with Dax's money and his blood), become the same cruel dictator that he had replaced. He was machine-gunning people down against a wall; all who would not fall into line with his regime. It was a way of the storyteller speaking to us saying, "in history, nothing really changes".

'Life Under The Sun', our Teacher would tell us, 'nothing really changes. It's all just folly and madness'. See, when you take God out of the equation in life, you get the reality that we see every day. There will never be a television newscast that will proclaim, "Imagine today, the providence of God". Wouldn't that have been startling on

9/11/2001? Or “Isn’t it an amazing fact that God put all of that oil in the east, right near Israel? Isn’t that an amazing fact of providence?” But we’ll never hear that from our newscasts or our broadcasts. They won’t mention God because, well frankly, they don’t believe in Him. Or they don’t want to be sued by some atheistic organization. So we just carry on with more and more ‘communicating’ with one another; living out this blind reality while we stay out of the path of light and truth.

And here’s what happens to us. When you don’t believe in God, you believe in everything else. We are an idolatrous nation and an idolatrous people. We have idols everywhere and they engage us. And we trust in them all. And when they disappoint us, we get angry and frustrated. All the while, as history rolls on and nothing really changes, ‘He who sitteth in the heavens just laughs’(Ps2:4). This is the generation, like all others, that scoff at His Word. Now, that is a good assessment of our times. And now we will telescope down and see the assessment of our wise friend.

He begins his argument (vs12) by contrasting ‘wisdom’ with ‘madness and folly’. With the characteristic phrase, ‘I turn my attention’ (Or ‘to consider’ or literally, ‘to see’, ‘to look into’) ‘the man with the powerful mind’ has changed subjects. Here is his *frustration* with life. The Polar Opposites; ‘mad folly’, and ‘wisdom’. Mark Them! Now, even though the world is full of folly, idolatry, and blindness, he immediately dismisses folly, (vs13) which he says is useless against wisdom. ‘It’s just as simple as light over darkness’ (light being far superior to darkness).

Verse 14. The man of wisdom (the man of skill) sees life as a responsibility. Indeed, he sees life as an accountability before God. But the fool with his folly, he just remains blind; or ‘he just stays the same, living in darkness’. The madness, the self-indulgence, the cynicism, the pursuit of pleasure at any level; that, says our Teacher, is no way to live. “Life in the fast lane”, as the Eagles sang it to us, “will make you lose your mind”.

But now notice the personal *frustration* for the Teacher in his life as a ‘wise man under the sun’. Instead of the wise man (and his better way to live) out distancing the fool, we find that they fall under the same fate! And that is the irony that causes his *frustration*. Verse 15: ‘I said to myself; ‘Even I will meet the same fate as the fool’. Death levels the field.

Robert Dick Wilson of Princeton knew 23 languages. He gave his life to teaching men the Word of God. And yet, when he died and they buried him, he was buried in the cemetery with men who couldn’t even read or write; much less know any other languages at all. It was the same end for both. The same end for a Lee Harvey Oswald as for a S. Lewis Johnson. Imagine that! Chilling! And that drove our Teacher here up the wall.

He explains in vs 16: ‘The wise man and the fool will not be long remembered for in the days to come, both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man (*the man of skill*) must die, too’. When I graduated from Dallas Seminary, on the night of our commencement, Dr. Vernon Grounds of Denver Seminary delivered the keynote speech. He said, and I will never forget, “Gentleman, the day that you die, your death will have the impact on the world of a falling leaf in the Colorado Rockies. That will be the magnitude of your end.” I’ve never forgotten that. And as I’ve been thinking about this book and what our wise Teacher tells us what happens at death—that rings so clear and true.

So let’s consider it: The moment of death, and then progressing out from the seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, and years—you and I will only be a memory. And from the point of death, we will be a fading memory. And when all your family and friends die; then you will be completely forgotten on this earth. Oh, they may have your photograph, but who were you? And what did you do? All of you will be gone, as if you lived here but really never existed.

Now look how he explains it. The word '*fate*' (vs14) equals death. It refers to the hard reality that man has no control; even though he (the wise man) is superior to the fool in every way.

Let me try to illustrate his frustration this way. Let's take a man that has graduated from our finest military academy. He graduates magna cum laude and he gets his commission and is assigned to Iraq. There he goes into Iraq and he is the leader of a small group of men. After he is acquainted there for a little period of time, this outstanding young man takes his group and they go out on patrol. And then, one bullet, and he's gone. He never lifts to fire his own rifle. And to add to our illustration, we would say that the man that killed him was a Bedouin who couldn't read or write. He had been recruited by Al Qaida just weeks before and he hardly knew how to fire a weapon. Matter of fact, it was just a bit of luck we would say that he got the shot off at all. Now, we think about that. Here is the young, bright leader. Gone! All that training. And for what?!

Any wonder that our friend with the powerful mind is frustrated? And his conclusion? Verse 16; 'the fool will die just like the wise'. So here is the end result; (vs17) 'Life under the sun was meaningless. It was a chasing after the wind.' But hang on; things are going to get worse. He now is going to move from *frustration* to total '*despair*'. That's his word; mark it well in verse 20.

Verse 18 presents us with a fresh set of facts to contemplate. 'I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I have to leave them to someone who comes after me. And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish?' (vs18-19).

Now, it's amazing how contemporary these very thoughts are. Just recently in the Wall Street Journal appeared this article; '*Redstone Split Bears On Future of Viacom and CBS*'. A falling out between Viacom Inc. chairman Sumner Redstone and his daughter and heir apparent, Sheree Redstone, is raising questions about future control of Redstone's media empire, which includes CBS Corp. Mr. Redstone, 84 years old, is no

longer confident in his 53-year-old daughter that she should succeed him as controlling shareholder and chairman when he dies. Mr. Redstone, like the patriarchs of some of the great American family companies, appears torn between wanting to pass his business onto his descendants and not wanting to let go at all. The father/daughter dispute comes less than six months after Mr. Redstone settled a lawsuit filed by his son, Brent. By holding out his interest in the family holding company he settled. And so we're told later in the article that the father and daughter now no longer speak. They communicate one with another with faxes and most recently through legal representation.'

Now see verse 19: You lose control over the things that you've built or the things that you treasure and all the lawyers in all the world can't fix this one; 'because you're going to be gone'. That brings on the '*despair*' (vs20). A man works hard, then he dies. But what happens to his wealth after him, now powerless to run the far-flung enterprise? Look at the phrase (vs18), "Whoever comes after me"—And just who will that be? It drives the producer of his fortune crazy.

Oh my goodness, after all the courtroom filings and all the courtroom fighting, just look who got Carroll Rosenbloom's Los Angeles Rams (now, the St. Louis Rams). Why, it's Georgia! And she didn't know anything about football! See what he's telling us? Verse 19: 'Death checkmates wise and prudent living'. A complete fool may end up with your shiny new Jag. The words "*who knows*" express one's complete lack of knowledge. So from '*frustration*' (vs 12) to '*despair*' (vs 18). ('*Despair*', a word, by the way, that occurs in five other places in the Old Testament. One that you might be most familiar with is I Samuel 27:1, where "...David thought to himself..." that Saul is eventually going to win this matter between ourselves; and I'm going to be killed. He was in '*despair*'.) And '*despair*' is an emotional response that drives one to the resignation of unchangeable facts. "This is the way it is", we say.

Now to make sure that we're following his argument closely and feeling his '*despair*' in verse 21 he is going to illustrate it with an anecdote. Here is a person who

works studiously with skill, achieving success. And he leaves his fortune to someone who didn't work for it, implying that they didn't deserve it. That, says the Teacher, is not only a tension producer, it's a moral outrage! His word; 'a great sin'; 'evil'.

Now, in verse 22 and 23 he reinforces his conclusion by asking and implicitly answering this question: What is the bottom line? Look, (vs22): 'What does a man get for his toil, energy, and anxiety?' Well what he gets (vs23) is 'no rest'. Those who work hard in the day, you would think the night would bring the rest that they deserve. But it doesn't. The phrase 'minds do not rest' is an idiomatic translation for 'their hearts do not lie in bed'.

Back in 1985, I started a company buying natural gas at the wellhead, taking title and shipping it up the pipeline to its destination. And I worked hard going into independent oil companies all over Oklahoma and Texas meeting people, shaking hands, drafting contracts, arranging lines of credit, and financing. I would go to bed during those nights and those days that I built that company with one particular thought in mind: "I just need to buy one more well". There I was staring at the ceiling, the proverbial carrot tied to my forehead.... Don't do that! Listen to a man that's been there; "Don't do that!" Making money, building a business can become an addiction. "Don't live that way!" God has brought you to Himself for bigger and better purposes than that. The constant grind is not the life of the Spirit. Rather, I've learned over time the painful lesson that it takes real discipline to slow down. It takes real discipline to stop the frantic motion. To get quiet takes discipline. To settle down and enjoy the simple pleasures that come from the hand of God takes discipline.

Look at verse 24, 'A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work'. This advice, and there is nothing better, is a formula that he is going to use in three other places throughout this book. (You might want to make a note: 3:12, 3:22, and 8:15). This is 'the man with a powerful mind' now turning and speaking to the believer in a fallen world. Now, we're going to get some 'light', even

though it is 'under the sun'. "Eat and drink" he says. These are physical enjoyments. And even your daily routine can bring a peaceful pleasure and enjoyment.

How is that so? Well look, he tells us. You see, all that has been given to you is from the sovereign hand of God. For without Him, who can eat or drink or find enjoyment? Don't you see? It's all a gift. Your family. Your friends. The ones who love you and support you. This church: The communion and fellowship of the brethren right here is a gift. And it's all here for you! Let me assure you it's here for you. The greatest people of my life I have met in the pews of Believers Chapel. Friends that have stayed with me over decades, they're here for you; for your comfort, for your peace, and for your concern. So enjoy your life (vs25). Thank God for your life. See God in it. See God through it. Your life is being guided by an all-wise providence and He knows what He is doing. And He knows what He's about.

Now, for some of us, I know things have been tough. He's taken you into the storm and you feel like He's left you there. But don't you believe that. Don't you believe that for one second. Look at verse 26. There are two classes of people here and 'the man with the powerful mind' is going to underscore their lives in general. Not in specifics, but in general. First; 'the righteous'; 'the believer'. The one whom God has set His affection upon for His own good pleasure. That's what we believe the scriptures teach and that's what we teach at Believers Chapel. God has chosen you. You have not chosen Him. He has chosen you for a purpose; to bring glory and honor to Himself. And He has chosen you because He delights in you and He delights in your personality. And He delights in having a personal relationship with you through life. That is beyond anything I can ever say or think. But that is what the bible teaches and that's what is taught at Believers Chapel. So: 'the righteous', 'the believer'.

Now, I want you to mark the word 'gives' (vs26). Would you underline that? Underline it! I don't know why He has put you in the circumstances that you are in. I don't know why He's taken you into the storm and not led you out yet; but you're there. And I want you to look at what you can expect, because this is what He is going to give.

That's the key word; give, and here is what He's doing. You can expect '*wisdom, and knowledge, and peace*'. All the things that the world wants and cannot duplicate. Everything that man needs, but he cannot buy. That's what God is doing. And that's what He's doing right now for you. And here is what those words mean; if I can just paraphrase them: 'He is giving you a perspective on life that you would not otherwise have. He is growing you up'.

I've been with some powerful businessmen: Men who have made a lot of money and been very successful. And to my surprise, I saw that they're just a bunch of selfish babies by the things that they say, and the things that they do, and the way they act.

That's not to be our lives. He's growing us up. He is making you a person of greater faith because you're valuable. You are really valuable. And you are really valuable to Him. The world says you're not of any value. Your wife may say you're not of any value. Your husband might say you're of no value here. Your children might say that to you.

But I want you to know that God says 'You are very valuable—to Me. I have set My love upon you and I've got a plan and purpose for you and it brings Me great delight and great glory to be in a relationship with you'. That's what you have going for you.

The God of all eternity has spoken through Holy Scripture. That's more powerful than the world's message to the man desperately seeking truth and light as he continues in a world that never changes and fumbles in blindness. No, God knows what He's doing and He knows what He's doing even right now. And my friend, let me assure you that you will not stay in the storm one moment longer than is necessary for His plan and His purpose to be accomplished. Your God, Who split the Red Sea, will take you out of your storm. He knows how to do that, and He will lead you by His righteous right hand, and He will set His affection upon you, and you will be a person of unquestioned character and integrity made strong and bold. Not because of the world or its goods, but

because you have been on that mountain face-to-face with the living God. That's His plan. That's His way.

But now I want you to see in our text that there is a second person mentioned in verse 26. He is called 'the sinner': The man who lives life on his own terms. He doesn't submit to God's authority. He is his own authority and unto himself. But I want you to notice your text; again, look at this word 'gives'. Underline it. You see, the man who doesn't know God may think that he's living life on his own. In his own mind he is living life on his own (but not according to the scriptures and not according to 'the man with the powerful mind'). For he ('the sinner') is being guided by an all-wise, sovereign purpose. And here is what that purpose is: His efforts in life are ultimately futile. For himself they are futile because he is laboring for the righteous and he doesn't even know it! In God's all wise providence, all of his gathering and all of his storing will ultimately be for the righteous; and it will be for the benefit of the righteous to the glory of God.

Let me give you a couple examples. Think of all the gold and jewelry of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. When Israel set out into the wilderness, God instructed the Israelites to ask their Egyptian neighbors for gold. And they gave it! All that wealth, all those jewels! And for what end? For what purpose? Jewels, gold, silver, diamonds, rubies, sapphires and emeralds—what do they do for you in a desert? But when the tabernacle is built, we know exactly what God was doing. Why, it was crossing the palm of the righteous for the glory of God. And it's not only for the glory of God, my friends, it's for the benefit of the believer.

Let me give you another illustration. I Samuel 30, the great plunder of the Amalekites spread among the towns and villages by David. David was not king at the time, but he went out and befriended the people that had been kind and generous and good to him. So, he took the wealth of the Amalekites and he put it in the hands of the righteous. That's what great people do. That's why David was a great man. That's the

way he lived his life; not interested in making anyone's fortune list. Rather, David was a flywheel and oh, did he spin it, when goods came his way.

See that last phrase to verse 26? "...meaningless, a chasing after the wind"? That is attached to that second character. That's life without God. That's the life of ultimate futility. You're not going to be able to keep it. You're not going to be able to get a good night's sleep. Your health is going to begin to fail. You're going to break your relationships in life. Over what? Money? Power? Those things are going to be gone from you as well. And then what? You'll stand before a righteous God. You'll stand before Him who lives in unapproachable light and what will you say that you lived your life for? Your way? Your way?!

My friends, I do not offer you the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. But, I offer you the righteousness of Christ. I offer you a personal relationship with Him. Don't be the second character. Be the first man. Know Christ. Seek Him above everything else.

And you can do that tonight, right here in the quietness of your own heart. Be united to the God who loves you and has a great and glorious purpose for you. That's the destiny of the believer, the man who walks with a righteous God. May God give you the grace to say in your heart "Lord, I'm a sinner. Lord, I hear your Word. I see myself as I really am, as Holy Scripture paints me, a wicked, self-centered, and evil person. And I repent and I desire to walk with you. Save me. Save me from myself".

May God give you the grace to do that tonight, as we now unite together in prayer.

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