

CHAPTER 2

Solomon having pronounced all vanity, and particularly knowledge and learning, which he was so far from giving himself joy of that he found the increase of it did but increase his sorrow, in this chapter he goes on to show what reason he has to be tired of this world, and with what little reason most men are fond of it.

I. He shows that there is no true happiness and satisfaction to be had in mirth and pleasure, and the delights of sense (v. 1-11).

II. He reconsiders the pretensions of wisdom, and allows it to be excellent and useful, and yet sees it clogged with such diminutions of its worth that it proves insufficient to make a man happy (v. 12-16).

III. He enquires how far the business and wealth of this world will go towards making men happy, and concludes, from his own experience, that, to those who set their hearts upon it, “it is vanity and vexation of spirit,” (v. 17-23), and that, if there be any good in it, it is only to those that sit loose to it (v. 24-26).

ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11

VANITY OF WORLDLY PLEASURE

Solomon here, in pursuit of the *summum bonum* — *the felicity* of man, adjourns out of his study, his library, his elaboratory, his council-chamber, where he had in vain sought for it, into the park and the playhouse, his garden and his summer-house; he exchanges the company of the philosophers and grave senators for that of the wits and gallants, and the beaux-esprits, of his court, to try if he could find true satisfaction and happiness among them. Here he takes a great step downward, from the noble pleasures of the intellect to the brutal ones of sense; yet, if he resolve to make a thorough trial, he must knock at this door, because here a great part of mankind imagine they have found that which he was in quest of.

I. He resolved to try what mirth would do and the pleasures of wit, whether he should be happy if he constantly entertained himself and others with merry stories and jests, banter and drollery; if he should furnish himself with all the pretty ingenious turns and repartees he could invent or pick up, fit to be laughed over, and all the bulls, and blunders, and foolish things, he could hear of, fit to be ridiculed and laughed at, so that he might be always in a merry humour.

1. This experiment made (v. 1): “Finding that *in much wisdom is much grief*, and that those who are serious are apt to be melancholy, *I said in my heart*” (to my heart), “*Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth*; I will try if that will give thee satisfaction.” Neither the temper of his mind nor his outward condition had any thing in them to keep him from being merry, but both agreed, as did all other advantages, to further it; *therefore* he resolved to take a lease this way, and said, “*Enjoy pleasure*, and take thy fill of it; cast away care, and resolve to be merry.” So a man may be, and yet have none of these fine things which he here got to entertain himself with; many that are poor are very merry; beggars in a barn are so to a proverb. Mirth is the entertainment of the fancy, and, though it comes short of the solid delights of the rational powers, yet it is to be preferred before those that are merely carnal and sensual. Some distinguish man from the brutes, not only as *animal rationale* — *a rational animal*, but as *animal risibile* — *a laughing animal*; therefore he that said to his soul, *Take thy ease, eat and drink*, added, *And be merry*, for it was in order to that that he would eat and drink. “Try therefore,” says Solomon, “to laugh and be fat, to laugh and be happy.”

2. The judgment he passed upon this experiment: *Behold, this also is vanity*, like all the rest; it yields no true satisfaction, v. 2. *I said of laughter, It is mad*, or, *Thou art mad*, and therefore I will have nothing to do with thee; *and of mirth* (of all sports and recreations, and whatever pretends to be diverting), *What doeth it?* or, *What doest thou?* Innocent mirth, soberly, seasonable, and moderately used, is a good thing, fits for business, and helps to soften the toils and chagrins of human life; but, when it is excessive and immoderate, it is foolish and fruitless.

(1.) It does no good: *What doeth it? Cui bono* — *of what use is it?* It will not avail to quiet a guilty conscience; no, nor to ease a sorrowful spirit; nothing is more ungrateful than *singing songs to a heavy heart*. It will not satisfy the soul, nor ever yield it true content. It is but a palliative cure to

the grievances of this present time. Great laughter commonly ends in a sigh.

(2.) It does a great deal of hurt: *It is mad*, that is, it makes men mad, it transports men into many indecencies, which are a reproach to their reason and religion. They are mad that indulge themselves in it, for it estranges the heart from God and divine things, and insensibly eats out the power of religion. Those that love to be merry forget to be serious, and, while they take the timbrel and harp, they *say to the Almighty, Depart from us*, ^{<891D>}Job 21:12, 14. We may, as Solomon, *prove ourselves, with mirth*, and judge of the state of our souls by this: How do we stand affected to it? Can we be merry and wise? Can we use it as sauce, and not as food? But we need not try, as Solomon did, whether it will make a happiness for us, for we may take his word for it, *It is mad*; and *What does it*? Laughter and pleasure (says Sir William Temple) come from very different affections of the mind; for, as men have no disposition to laugh at things they are most pleased with, so they are very little pleased with many things they laugh at.

II. Finding himself not happy in that which pleased his fancy, he resolved next to try that which would please the palate, v. 3. Since the knowledge of the creature would not satisfy, he would see what the liberal use of it would do: *I sought in my heart to give myself unto wine*, that is, to good meat and good drink. Many give themselves to these without consulting their hearts at all, not looking any further than merely the gratification of the sensual appetite; but Solomon applied himself to it rationally, and as a man, critically, and only to make an experiment. Observe,

1. He did not allow himself any liberty in the use of the delights of sense till he had tired himself with his severe studies. Till his *increase of sorrow*, he never thought of giving himself *to wine*. When we have spent ourselves in doing good we may then most comfortably refresh ourselves with the gifts of God's bounty. *Then* the delights of sense are rightly used when they are used as we use cordials, only when we need them; as Timothy drank wine for his health's sake, ^{<50E3>}1 Timothy 5:23. *I thought to draw my flesh with wine* (so the margin reads it) or *to wine*. Those that have addicted themselves to drinking did at first put a force upon themselves; they drew their flesh to it, and with it; but they should remember to what miseries they hereby draw themselves.

2. He then looked upon it as folly, and it was with reluctance that he gave himself to it; as St. Paul, when he commended himself, called it a *weakness*, and desired to be borne with in his *foolishness*, ~~410~~ 2 Corinthians 11:1. He sought *to lay hold on folly*, to see the utmost that that folly would do towards making men happy; but he had like to have carried the jest (as we say) too far. He resolved that the folly should not take hold of him, not get the mastery of him, but he would lay hold on it, and keep it at a distance; yet he found it too hard for him.

3. He took care at the same time to *acquaint himself with wisdom*, to manage himself wisely in the use of his pleasures, so that they should not do him any prejudice nor disfit him to be a competent judge of them. When he *drew his flesh with wine* he *led his heart with wisdom* (so the word is), kept up his pursuits after knowledge, did not make a sot of himself, nor become a slave to his pleasures, but his studies and his feasts were foils to each other, and he tried whether both mixed together would give him that satisfaction which he could not find in either separately. This Solomon proposed to himself, but he found it *vanity*; for those that think to give themselves to wine, and yet to acquaint their hearts with wisdom, will perhaps deceive themselves as much as those do that think to serve both God and mammon. *Wine is a mocker*; it is a great cheat; and it will be impossible for any man to say that thus far he will give himself to it and no further.

4. That which he aimed at was not to gratify his appetite, but to find out man's happiness, and this, because it pretended to be so, must be tried among the rest. Observe the description he gives of man's happiness — it is *that good for the sons of men which they should do under the heaven all their days*.

(1.) That which we are to enquire after is not so much the good we must have (we may leave that to God), but the good we must do; that ought to be our care. *Good Master, what good thing shall I do?* Our happiness consists not in being idle, but in doing aright, in being well employed. If we *do that which is good*, no doubt we shall have comfort and *praise of the same*.

(2.) It is good to be done *under the heaven*, while we are here in this world, while it is day, while our doing time lasts. This is our state of work and service; it is in the other world that we must expect the retribution. Thither our works will follow us.

(3.) It is to be done *all the days of our life*. The good we are to do we must persevere in the doing of to the end, while our doing time lasts, *the number of the days of our life* (so it is in the margin); the days of our life are numbered to us by him in whose hand our times are and they are all to be spent as he directs. But that any man should give himself to wine, in hopes to find out in that the best way of living in this world, was an absurdity which Solomon here, in the reflection, condemns himself for. Is it possible that this should be the good that men should do? No; it is plainly very bad.

III. Perceiving quickly that it was folly to give himself to wine, he next tried the most costly entertainments and amusements of princes and great men. He had a vast income; the revenue of his crown was very great, and he laid it out so as might most please his own humour and make him look great.

1. He gave himself much to building, both in the city and in the country; and, having been at such vast expense in the beginning of his reign to build a house for God, he was the more excusable if afterwards he pleased his own fancy in building for himself; he began his work at the right end (^{<465>}Matthew 6:33), not as the people (^{<300>}Haggai 1:4), that *ceiled their own houses* while God's *lay waste*, and it prospered accordingly. In building, he had the pleasure of employing the poor and doing good to posterity. We read of Solomon's buildings (^{<105>}1 Kings 9:15-19), and they were all *great works*, such as became his purse, and spirit, and great dignity. See his mistake; he enquired after the *good* works he should do (v. 3), and, in pursuit of the enquiry, applied himself to *great* works. *Good* works indeed are truly great, but many are reputed great works which are far from being good, wondrous works which are not gracious, ^{<402>}Matthew 7:22.

2. He took to love a garden, which is to some as bewitching as building. He *planted himself vineyards*, which the soil and climate of the land of Canaan favoured; he *made himself fine gardens and orchards* (v. 5), and perhaps the art of gardening was no way inferior then to what it is now. He had not only forests of timber-trees, but *trees of all kinds of fruit*, which he himself had planted; and, if any worldly business would yield a man happiness, surely it must be that which Adam was employed in while he was in innocency.

3. He laid out a great deal of money in water-works, ponds, and canals, not for sport and diversion, but for use, *to water the wood that brings forth*

trees (v. 6); he not only planted, but watered, and then left it to God to give the increase. *Springs of water* are great *blessings* (^{<1659>}Joshua 15:19); but where nature has provided them art must direct them, to make them serviceable, ^{<1711>}Proverbs 21:1.

4. He increased his family. When he proposed to himself to do *great works* he must employ many hands, and therefore procured *servants and maidens*, which were bought with his money, and of those he *had servants born in his house*, v. 7. Thus his retinue was enlarged and his court appeared more magnificent. See ^{<1728>}Ezra 2:58.

5. He did not neglect country business, but both entertained and enriched himself with that, and was not diverted from it either by his studies or by his pleasures. He *had large possessions of great and small cattle*, herds and flocks, as his father had before him (^{<1779>}1 Chronicles 27:29, 31), not forgetting that his father, in the beginning, was a keeper of sheep. Let those that deal in cattle neither despise their employment nor be weary of it, remembering that Solomon puts his having *possessions of cattle* among his *great works* and his pleasures.

6. He grew very rich, and was not at all impoverished by his building and gardening, as many are, who, for that reason only, repent it, and call it *vanity and vexation*. Solomon scattered and yet increased. He filled his exchequer with *silver and gold*, which yet did not stagnate there, but were made to circulate through his kingdom, so that he made *silver to be in Jerusalem as stones* (^{<1817>}1 Kings 10:27); nay, he had the *segullah, the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces*, which was, for richness and rarity, more accounted of than *silver and gold*. The neighbouring kings, and the distant provinces of his own empire, sent him the richest presents they had, to obtain his favour and the instructions of his wisdom.

7. He had every thing that was charming and diverting, all sorts of melody and music, vocal and instrumental, *men-singers and women-singers*, the best voices he could pick up, and all the wind and band-instruments that were then in use. His father had a genius for music, but it should seem he employed it more to serve his devotion than the son, who made it more for his diversion. These are called *the delights of the sons of men*; for the gratifications of sense are the things that the generality of people set their affections upon and take the greatest complacency in. The delights of the children of God are of quite another nature, pure, spiritual, and heavenly, and the delights of angels.

8. He enjoyed, more than ever any man did, a composition of rational and sensitive pleasures at the same time. He was, in this respect, *great, and increased more than all that were before him*, that he was wise amidst a thousand earthly enjoyments. It was strange, and the like was never met with,

(1.) That his pleasures did not debauch his judgment and conscience. In the midst of these entertainments *his wisdom remained with him*, v. 9. In the midst of all these childish delights he preserved his spirit manly, kept the possession of his own soul, and maintained the dominion of reason over the appetites of sense; such a vast stock of wisdom had he that it was not wasted and impaired, as any other man's would have been, by this course of life. But let none be emboldened hereby to lay the reins on the neck of their appetites, presuming that they may do that and yet retain their wisdom, for they have not such a strength of wisdom as Solomon had; nay, and Solomon was deceived; for how did *his wisdom remain with him* when he lost his religion so far as to build altars to strange gods, for the humouring of his strange wives? But thus far *his wisdom remained with him* that he was master of his pleasures, and not a slave to them, and kept himself capable of making a judgment of them. He went over into the enemies' country, not as a deserter, but as a *spy, to discover the nakedness of their land*.

(2.) Yet his judgment and conscience gave no check to his pleasures, nor hindered him from exacting the very quintessence of the delights of sense, v. 10. It might be objected against his judgment in this matter that if *his wisdom remained with him* he could not take the liberty that was necessary to a full experimental acquaintance with it: "Yea," said he, "I took as great a liberty as any man could take, for *whatsoever my eyes desired I kept not from them*, if it could be compassed by lawful means, though ever so difficult or costly; and as *I withheld not any joy from my heart* that I had a mind to, so *I withheld not my heart from any joy*, but, with a *non-obstante* — *with the full exercise* of my wisdom, I had a high gust of my pleasures, relished and enjoyed them as much as ever any Epicure did;" nor was there any thing either in the circumstances of his condition or in the temper of his spirit to sour or embitter them, or give them any alloy. In short,

[1.] He had as much pleasure in his business as ever any man had: *My heart rejoiced in all my labour*; so that the toil and fatigue of that were no damp to his pleasures.

[2.] He had no less profit by his business. He met with no disappointment in it to give him any disturbance: *This was my portion of all my labour*; he had this added to all the rest of his pleasures that in them he did not only see, but eat, the labour of his hands; and this was all he had, for indeed it was all he could expect, from his labours. It sweetened his business that he enjoyed the success of it, and it sweetened his enjoyments that they were the product of his business; so that, upon the whole, he was certainly as happy as the world could make him.

9. We have, at length, the judgment he deliberately gave of all this, v. 11. When the Creator had made his great works he reviewed them, and *behold, all was very good*; every thing pleased him. But when Solomon reviewed *all his works that his hands had wrought* with the utmost cost and care, *and the labour that he had laboured to do* in order to make himself easy and happy, nothing answered his expectation; *behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit*; he had no satisfaction in it, no advantage by it; *there was no profit under the sun*, neither by the employments nor by the enjoyments of this world.

~~2117~~ ECCLESIASTES 2:12-16

SUPERIORITY OF WISDOM TO FOLLY

Solomon having tried what satisfaction was to be had in learning first, and then in the pleasures of sense, and having also put both together, here compares them one with another and passes a judgment upon them.

I. He sets himself to consider both wisdom and folly. He had considered these before (~~2117~~ Ecclesiastes 1:17); but lest it should be thought he was then too quick in passing a judgment upon them, he here turns himself again to behold them, to see if, upon a second view and second thoughts, he could gain more satisfaction in the search than he had done upon the first. He was sick of his pleasures, and, as nauseating them, he turned from them, that he might again apply himself to speculation; and if, upon this rehearing of the cause, the verdict be still the same, the judgment will

surely be decisive; *for what can the man do that comes after the king?* especially such a king, who had so much of this world to make the experiment upon and so much wisdom to make it with. The baffled trial needs not be repeated. No man can expect to find more satisfaction in the world than Solomon did, nor to gain a greater insight into the principles of morality; when a man has done what he can still it is *that which has been already done*. Let us learn,

1. Not to indulge ourselves in a fond conceit that we can mend that which has been well done before us. Let us *esteem others better than ourselves*, and think how unfit we are to attempt the improvement of the performances of better heads and hands than ours, and rather own how much we are beholden to them, ~~415~~ John 4:37, 38.

2. To acquiesce in Solomon's judgment of the things of this world, and not to think of repeating the trial; for we can never think of having such advantages as he had to make the experiment nor of being able to make it with equal application of mind and so little danger to ourselves.

II. He gives the preference to wisdom far before folly. Let none mistake him, as if, when he speaks of the vanity of human lite-rapture, literature, he designed only to amuse men with a paradox, or were about to write (as a great wit once did) *Encomium moriae — A panegyric in praise of folly*. No, he is maintaining sacred truths, and therefore is careful to guard against being misunderstood. I soon *saw* (says he) *that there is an excellency in wisdom more than in folly*, as much as there is in light above darkness. The pleasures of wisdom, though they suffice not to make men happy, yet vastly transcend the pleasures of wine. Wisdom enlightens the soul with surprising discoveries and necessary directions for the right government of itself; but sensuality (for that seems to be especially the folly here meant) clouds and eclipses the mind, and is as darkness to it; it puts out men's eyes, makes them to stumble in the way and wander out of it. Or, though wisdom and knowledge will not make a man happy (St Paul shows a *more excellent way* than gifts, and that is grace), yet it is much better to have them than to be without them, in respect of our present safety, comfort, and usefulness; for *the wise man's eyes are in his head* (v. 14), where they should be, ready to discover both the dangers that are to be avoided and the advantages that are to be improved; a wise man has not his reason to seek when he should use it, but looks about him and is quick-sighted, knows both where to step and where to stop; whereas *the fool*

walks in darkness, and is ever and anon either at a loss, or at a plunge, either bewildered, that he knows not which way to go, or embarrassed, that he cannot go forward. A man that is discreet and considerate has the command of his business, and acts decently and safely, as those that walk in the day; but he that is rash, and ignorant, and sottish, is continually making blunders, running upon one precipice or other; his projects, his bargains, are all foolish, and ruin his affairs. Therefore *get wisdom, get understanding.*

III. Yet he maintains that, in respect of lasting happiness and satisfaction, the wisdom of this world gives a man very little advantage; for,

1. Wise men and fools fare alike. “It is true the wise man has very much the advantage of the fool in respect of foresight and insight, and yet the greatest probabilities do so often come short of success that *I myself perceived*, by my own experience, that *one event happens to them all* (v. 14); those that are most cautious of their health are as soon sick as those that are most careless of it, and the most suspicious are imposed upon.” David had observed that *wise men die*, and are involved in the same common calamity with the fool and the brutish person, ³⁹⁹Psalm 49:12. See ch. 9:11. Nay, it has of old been observed that *Fortune favours fools*, and that half-witted men often thrive most, while the greatest projectors forecast worst for themselves. The same sickness, the same sword, devours wise men and fools. Solomon applies this mortifying observation to himself (v. 15), that though he was a wise man, he might not *glory in his wisdom; I said to my heart*, when it began to be proud or secure, *As it happens to the fool, so it happens to me, even to me*; for thus emphatically it is expressed in the original: “So, *as for me*, it happens to me. Am I rich? So is many a Nabal that fares as sumptuously as I do. Is a foolish man sick, does he get a fall? So do I, *even I*; and neither my wealth nor my wisdom will be my security. *And why was I then more wise?* Why should I take so much pains to get wisdom, when, as to this life, it will stand me in so little stead? *Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity.*” Some make this a correction of what was said before, like that (³⁷⁰Psalm 77:10), “*I said, This is my infirmity*; it is my folly to think that wise men and fools are upon a level;” but really they seem to be so, in respect of the event, and therefore it is rather a confirmation of what he had before said, That a man may be a profound philosopher and politician and yet not be a happy man.

2. Wise men and fools are forgotten alike (v. 16): *There is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool.* It is promised to the righteous that they *shall be had in everlasting remembrance, and their memory shall be blessed, and they shall shortly shine as the stars;* but there is no such promise made concerning the wisdom of this world, that that shall perpetuate men's names, for those names only are perpetuated that are *written in heaven,* and otherwise the names of this world's wise men are written with those of its fools in the dust. *That which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten.* What was much talked of in one generation is, in the next, as if it had never been. New persons and new things jostle out the very remembrance of the old, which in a little time are looked upon with contempt and at length quite buried in oblivion. *Where is the wise? Where is the disputer of this world?* ^{<2117>}1 Corinthians 1:20. And it is upon this account that he asks, *How dies the wise man? As the fool.* Between the death of a godly and a wicked man there is a great difference, but not between the death of a wise man and a fool; the fool is buried and forgotten (^{<2118>}Ecclesiastes 8:10), *and no one remembered the poor man that by his wisdom delivered the city* (^{<2115>}Ecclesiastes 9:15); so that to both the grave is a *land of forgetfulness;* and wise and learned men, when they have been awhile there out of sight, grow out of mind, a new generation arises that *knew them not.*

^{<2117>}ECCLESIASTES 2:17-26

SOURCES OF DISSATISFACTION

Business is a thing that wise men have pleasure in. They are in their element when they are in their business, and complain if they be out of business. They may sometimes be tired with their business, but they are not weary of it, nor willing to leave it off. Here therefore one would expect to have found the good that men should do, but Solomon tried this too; after a contemplative life and a voluptuous life, he betook himself to an active life, and found no more satisfaction in it than in the other; still it is all *vanity and vexation of spirit,* of which he gives an account in these verses, where observe,

I. What the business was which he made trial of; it was business *under the sun* (v. 17-20), about the things of this world, sublunary things, the riches,

honours, and pleasures of this present time; it was the business of a king. There is business *above the sun*, perpetual business, which is perpetual blessedness; what we do in conformity to that business (doing *God's will as it is done in heaven*) and in pursuance of that blessedness, will turn to a good account; we shall have no reason to hate that labour, nor to despair of it. But it is *labour under the sun*, labour for the *meat that perishes* (~~412~~ John 6:27; ~~251~~ Isaiah 55:2), that Solomon here speaks of with so little satisfaction. It was the better sort of business, not that of the *hewers of wood and drawers of water* (it is not so strange if men hate all that labour), but it was *in wisdom, and knowledge, and equity*, v. 21. It was rational business, which related to the government of his kingdom and the advancement of its interests. It was labour managed by the dictates of wisdom, of natural and acquired knowledge, and the directions of justice. It was labour at the council-board and in the courts of justice. It was labour wherein he *showed himself wise* (v. 19), which as much excels the labour wherein men only show themselves strong as the endowments of the mind, by which we are allied to angels, do those of the body, which we have in common with the brutes. That which many people have in their eye more than any thing else, in the prosecution of their worldly business, is to *show themselves wise*, to get the reputation of ingenious men and men of sense and application.

II. His falling out with this business. He soon grew weary of it.

1. He *hated all his labour*, because he did not meet with that satisfaction in which he expected. After he had had his fine houses, and gardens, and water-works, awhile, he began to nauseate them, and look upon them with contempt, as children, who are eager for a toy and fond of it at first, but, when they have played with it awhile, are weary of it, and throw it away, and must have another. This expresses not a gracious hatred of these things, which is our duty, to love them less than God and religion (~~245~~ Luke 14:26), nor a sinful hatred of them, which is our folly, to be weary of the place God has assigned us and the work of it, but a natural hatred of them, arising from a surfeit upon them and a sense of disappointment in them.

2. He *caused his heart to despair of all his labour* (v. 20); he took pains to possess himself with a deep sense of the vanity of worldly business, that it would not bring in the advantage and satisfaction he had formerly flattered himself with the hopes of. Our hearts are very loth to quit their expectations of great things from the creature; we must go about, must fetch a compass, in arguing with them, to convince them that there is not

that in the things of this world which we are apt to promise ourselves from them. Have we so often bored and sunk into this earth for some rich mine of satisfaction, and found not the least sign or token of it, but been always frustrated in the search, and shall we not at length set our hearts at rest and despair of ever finding it?

3. He came to that, at length, that he *hated life itself* (v. 17), because it is subject to so many toils and troubles, and a constant series of disappointments. God had given Solomon such largeness of heart, and such vast capacities of mind, that he experienced more than other men of the unsatisfying nature of all the things of this life and their insufficiency to make him happy. Life itself, that is so precious to a man, and such a blessing to a good man, may become a burden to a man of business.

III. The reasons of this quarrel with his life and labours. Two things made him weary of them: —

1. That his business was so great a toil to himself: The *work that he had wrought under the sun was grievous unto him*, v. 17. His thoughts and cares about it, and that close and constant application of mind which was requisite to it, were a burden and fatigue to him, especially when he grew old. It is the effect of a curse on that we are to work upon. Our business is said to be *the work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord had cursed* (⁴¹³Genesis 5:29) and of the weakening of the faculties we are to work with, and of the sentence pronounced on us, that in *the sweat of our face we must eat bread*. Our labour is called *the vexation of our heart* (v. 22); it is to most a force upon themselves, so natural is it to us to love our ease. A man of business is described to be uneasy both in his *going out* and his *coming in*, v. 23.

(1.) He is deprived of his pleasure by day, for *all his days are sorrow*, not only sorrowful, but sorrow itself, nay, many sorrows and various; his travail, or labour, all day, is grief. Men of business ever and anon meet with that which vexes them, and is an occasion of anger or sorrow to them. Those that are apt to fret find that the more dealings they have in the world the oftener they are made to fret. The world is a *vale of tears*, even to those that have much of it. Those that *labour* are said to be *heavy-laden*, and are therefore called to come to Christ for rest, ⁴¹³Matthew 11:28.

(2.) He is disturbed in his repose *by night*. When he is overcome with the hurries of the day, and hopes to find relief when he lays his head on his

pillow, he is disappointed there; cares *hold his eyes waking*, or, if he sleep, yet his heart wakes, and that *takes no rest in the night*. See what fools those are that make themselves drudges to the world, and do not make God their rest; night and day they cannot but be uneasy. So that, upon the whole matter, it is *all vanity*, v. 17. *This is vanity* in particular (v. 19, 23), nay, it is *vanity and a great evil*, v. 21. It is a great affront to God and a great injury to themselves, therefore a *great evil*; it is a vain thing *to rise up early and sit up late* in pursuit of this world's goods, which were never designed to be our chief good.

2. That the gains of his business must all be left to others. Prospect of advantage is the spring of action and the spur of industry; *therefore* men labour, because they hope to get by it; if the hope fail, the labour flags; and *therefore* Solomon quarrelled with all the works, the great works, he had made, because they would not be of any lasting advantage to himself.

(1.) He must leave them. He could not at death take them away with him, nor any share of them, nor should he return any more to them (~~870~~ Job 7:10), nor would the remembrance of them do him any good, ~~265~~ Luke 16:25. But I must *leave all to the man that shall be after me*, to the generation that comes up in the room of that which is passing away. As there were many before us, who built the houses that we live in, and into whose purchases and labours we have entered, so there shall be many after us, who shall live in the houses that we build, and enjoy the fruit of our purchases and labours. Never was land lost for want of an heir. To a gracious soul this is no uneasiness at all; why should we grudge others their turn in the enjoyments of this world, and not rather be pleased that, when we are gone, those that come after us shall fare the better for our wisdom and industry? But to a worldly mind, that seeks for its own happiness in the creature, it is a great vexation to think of leaving the beloved self behind, at this uncertainty.

(2.) He must leave them to those that would never have taken so much pains for them, and will thereby excuse himself from taking any pains. He that raised the estate did it by *labouring in wisdom, and knowledge, and equity*; but he that enjoys it and spends it (it may be) *has not laboured therein* (v. 21), and, more than that, never will. The bee toils to maintain the drone. Nay, it proves a snare to him: it is left him *for his portion*, which he rests in, and takes up with; and miserable he is in being put off with it for a portion. Whereas, if an estate had not come to him thus easily,

who knows but he might have been both industrious and religious? Yet we ought not to perplex ourselves about this, since it may prove otherwise, that what is well got may come to one that will use it well and do good with it.

(3.) He knows not whom he must leave it to (for God makes heirs), or at least what *he* will prove to whom he leaves it, whether *a wise man or a fool*, a wise man that will make it more or a fool that will bring it to nothing; *yet he shall have rule over all my labour*, and foolishly undo that which his father wisely did. It is probable that Solomon wrote this very feelingly, being afraid what Rehoboam would prove. St Jerome, in his commentary on this passage, applies this to the good books which Solomon wrote, in which he had shown himself wise, but he knew not into whose hands they would fall, perhaps into the hands of a fool, who, according to the perverseness of his heart, makes a bad use of what was well written. So that, upon the whole matter, he asks (v. 22), *What has man of all his labour?* What has he to himself and to his own use? What has he that will go with him into another world?

IV. The best use which is therefore to be made of the wealth of this world, and that is to use it cheerfully, to take the comfort of it, and do good with it. With this he concludes the chapter, v. 24-26. There is no true happiness to be found in these things. They are *vanity*, and, if happiness be expected from them, the disappointment will be *vexation of spirit*. But he will put us in a way to make the best of them, and to avoid the inconveniences he had observed. We must neither over-toil ourselves, so as, in pursuit of more, to rob ourselves of the comfort of what we have, nor must we over-ward for hereafter, nor lose our own enjoyment of what we have to lay it up for those that shall come after us, but serve ourselves out of it first. Observe,

1. What that good is which is here recommended to us; and which is the utmost pleasure and profit we can expect or extract from the business and profit of this world, and the furthest we can go to rescue it from its *vanity* and the *vexation* that is in it.

(1.) We must do our duty with them, and be more in care how to use an estate well, for the ends for which we were entrusted with it, than how to raise or increase an estate. This is intimated v. 26, where *those* only are said to have the comfort of this life who are good in *God's sight*, and

again, *good before God*, truly good, as Noah, whom *God saw righteous before him*. We must set God always before us, and give diligence in every thing to approve ourselves to him. The Chaldee-paraphrase says, *A man should make his soul to enjoy good by keeping the commandments of God and walking in the ways that are right before him*, and (v. 25) *by studying the words of the law, and being in care about the day of the great judgment that is to come*.

(2.) We must take the comfort of them. These things will not make a happiness for the soul; all the good we can have out of them is for the body, and if we make use of them for the comfortable support of that, so that it may be fit to serve the soul and able to keep pace with it in the service of God, then they turn to a good account. *There is therefore nothing better for a man*, as to these things, than to allow himself a sober cheerful use of them, according as his rank and condition are, to have meat and drink out of them for himself, his family, his friends, and so delight his senses and make his *soul enjoy good*, all the good that is to be had out of them; do not lose that, in pursuit of that good which is not to be had out of them. But observe, He would not have us to give up business, and take our ease, that we may *eat and drink*; no, we must *enjoy good in our labour*; we must use these things, not to excuse us from, but to make us diligent and cheerful in, our worldly business.

(3.) We must herein *acknowledge God*; we must see that *it is from the hand of God*, that is,

[1.] The *good things* themselves that we enjoy are so, not only the products of his creating power, but the gifts of his providential bounty to us. And *then* they are truly pleasant to us when we take them from the hand of God as a Father, when we eye his wisdom giving us that which is fittest for us, and acquiesce in it, and taste his love and goodness, relish them, and are thankful for them.

[2.] A heart to enjoy them is so; this is the gift of God's grace. Unless he give us wisdom to make a right use of what he has, in his providence, bestowed upon us, and withal peace of conscience, that we may discern God's favour in the world's smiles, we cannot make our souls enjoy any good in them.

2. Why we should have this in our eye, in the management of ourselves as to this world, and look up to God for it.

(1.) Because Solomon himself, with all his possessions, could aim at no more and desire no better (v. 25): “*Who can hasten to this more than I? This is that which I was ambitious of: I wished for no more; and those that have but little, in comparison with what I have, may attain to this, to be content with what they have and enjoy the good of it.*” Yet Solomon could not obtain it by his own wisdom, without the special grace of God, and therefore directs us to expect it from the hand of God and pray to him for it.

(2.) Because riches are a blessing or a curse to a man according as he has or has not a heart to make good use of them.

[1.] God makes them a reward to a good man, if with them he give him *wisdom, and knowledge, and joy*, to enjoy them cheerfully himself and to communicate them charitably to others. To those who are *good in God's sight*, who are of a good spirit, honest and sincere, pay a deference to their God and have a tender concern for all mankind, *God will give wisdom and knowledge in this world, and joy with the righteous in the world to come*; so the Chaldee. Or he will give that wisdom and knowledge in things natural, moral, political, and divine, which will be a constant joy and pleasure to them.

[2.] He makes them a punishment to a bad man if he denies him a heart to take the comfort of them, for they do but tantalize him and tyrannize over him: *To the sinner God gives by travail*, by leaving him to himself and his own foolish counsels, to *gather and to heap up* that, which, as to himself, will not only burden him like *thick clay* (³¹¹⁶Habakkuk 2:6), but be *a witness against him and eat his flesh as it were fire* (³¹¹⁸James 5:3); while God designs, by an overruling providence, to give it to him that is *good before him*; for the *wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just*, and *gathered for him that will pity the poor*. Note, *First, Godliness, with contentment, is great gain*; and *those only have true joy that are good in God's sight*, and that have it from him and in him. *Secondly*, Ungodliness is commonly punished with discontent and an insatiable covetousness, which are sins that are their own punishment. *Thirdly*, When God gives abundance to wicked men it is with design to force them to a resignation in favour of his own children, when they are of age and ready for it, as the Canaanites kept possession of the good land till the time appointed for Israel's entering upon it.

[3.] The burden of the song is still the same: *This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.* It is vanity, at the best, even to the good man; when he has all that the sinner has scraped together it will not make him happy without something else; but it is *vexation of spirit* to the sinner to see what he had laid up enjoyed by him that is *good in God's sight*, and therefore evil in his. So that, take it which way you will, the conclusion is firm, *All is vanity and vexation of spirit.*