

**THREE WEEKS  
WITH THE  
QOHELETH**

**REFLECTIVE MEDITATIONS ON  
THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
MENTAL WELLNESS WITHIN THE  
COVID PANDEMIC**

**RASIKA ABEYSINGHE**



THREE WEEKS WITH THE QOHELETH

REFLECTIVE MEDITATIONS ON THE  
BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO THE COVID PANDEMIC

RASIKA ABEYSINGHE

Creative Printers

Kandy

2021

Printed by Creative Printers  
No:3A, Bahirawakanda Road, Kandy  
Sri Lanka  
2021

Email – [rtbabeysinghe@gmail.com](mailto:rtbabeysinghe@gmail.com)  
Copyright © Rasika Abeysinghe

## **Dedication**

To those who tire to bring peace of mind in an age of  
anxiety

## Contents

Preface	7
Foreword	8
1. Labour what use of it?	10
2. Knowledge, wisdom and knowing	15
3. Wealth, Riches and Luxuries	20
4. Occupation and Pleasing God	25
5. Work Life and Godliness	30
6. Righteousness and the Peace of God	35
7. Justice of God and Injustice of Humans	39
8. Community to the Rescue	45
9. Peace of Mind	49
10. Holistic Wellness	53
11. Appreciating everything	57
12. Growing in Awareness	61
13. Whither of Knowing	65
14. Human Authority and God's Guidance	69
15. Human Nature and Perfection	73
16. Nurturing Life	77
17. Living in the Moment	81
18. God's grace in human institutions?	85
19. Managing one's self	89
20. Wellness of the Mind	93
21. God our Refuge	96
Further study notes I	98
Further Study Notes II	103
Further Study Notes III	125

## **PREFACE**

Ecclesiastes is always going to be an interesting read, at a time such as this, and its deep sense of life and meaning of existence continue to give the reader new insights at each sentence. We would be surprised to know that this is no 'one message book' eventhough the teacher maintains the same premises in almost all chapters.

With the onset of the pandemic, we did start to question life, death, faith, purpose etc and amazingly there are many relevant point in this book, sometime which surpasses the general main focuses of Christian faith.

So this invitation is for you all , as you read Ecclesiastes and hopefully, there will be much fruitful discussion ensued .

R Abeyasinghe

Feast of St Francis 2021

## **FOREWORD**

There probably has not been a more suitable time than this, to reflect upon mental awareness, mental well-being and health. We hear of many cases regardless of any demographic division, of fears, anxieties and stress that have overcome persons.

In the past few months , with wave upon wave in the pandemic, the emotional and psycho-social thresholds of our mental wellness have been stretched to a new limit. In our ministry at the hospital, we have experienced this trend and with it our response to them and to the ensuing discussion on mental health has been enhanced.

As Christians we receive much strength from the Word of God and there are many deep and moving passages that we use day in and day out for calmness and peace of mind. The book of Ecclesiastes is not one of these straightforward presentations on the human psyche, but it holds much weight in depth and sometimes even in mysterious input on life, purpose of life and how to live



a life devoid of anxiety. We welcome this reflection by Rev Rasika seeking to bring some of these aspects to a wider readership within the setting of the pandemic. As persons who are involved with facilitating better mental wellness among everyone, we ourselves are called to develop awareness within us. In a world which is increasingly becoming competitive, stressful and secularized let us seek God's guidance through God's Spirit as we find meaning and purpose in this task through the example of our Lord Jesus.

Revd Dr Arul Dhas  
Senior Chaplain  
Christian Medical College  
Vellore  
1 Oct 2021

## 1. Labour what use of it?

### Portion – Chapter 1

<sup>2</sup> Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities!

All is vanity.

<sup>3</sup> What do people gain from all the toil at which they toil under the sun?

<sup>8</sup> All things<sup>[c]</sup> are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing,

or the ear filled with hearing.

<sup>9</sup> What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done;

there is nothing new under the sun.

<sup>10</sup> Is there a thing of which it is said, “See, this is new”?

It has already been,

in the ages before us.

### Commentary

Before we look at commenting on this portion, we must look at the word ‘vanity’. We will be encountering this word quite too often as we proceed in studying this book. Vanity is defined loosely as pride or rather

excessive pride. In this context it is something like saying 'this is too much'. In a Sri Lankan context, it is like starting an essay with an 'Ayyo' or 'Appo'. It is almost as if the teacher exasperates even before telling the audience what he or she was planning on saying. Or the teacher maybe making an extreme and strong point at the very early of the recitation. The teacher continues to develop two points to evidence this claim. The first of this is simply the question 'what is the meaning of toil or labour or work'. While this could be honey in the ears of the less energetic persons, the teacher explains that labour is useless in the sense that we do not end up making any significant contribution.

I am sure the scientists of the age might object here, but the teacher claims that even with all these contributions and 'work' people might put in, it does not really change the earth. For this the examples given are the persistence of the sun, the wind and the streams. The second of this is the wearisome nature of work. All labour does not give satisfaction to human beings. After all what's done, the question still remains, have we done anything new?

In verse ten the teacher questions if all what we do now is not merely a repeat. Of course the focus must be on the nature of work rather than on the content of work. People of old built pyramids and now we build sky scrapers. And in the preceding verse no one will be remembered for their work.

### **Exposition**

In the past year or so, with the onset of the pandemic, this thought would surely have hit home with us. We work so hard at our 'jobs' even to the point of neglecting those around us as well as situations which need our attention. Maybe before the pandemic hit we would never have bothered about these. So much so, that this reality was a hit on the head for many of us. Going in the lines of the respected teacher, work or the concept of labour, must become only a means to an end, but certainly not an end in itself. In a world where from our birth we get up each day in the hope of earning an income or using that mode to income to have fame and status in society, its hardly surprising that we become delusional with the concept of work. We may spend

years on end struggling at one job or the other, and seek no respite even in terms of commitments and ill. The ones who may take work easy are usually termed lazy bones or not fit enough to be proceed further in life. In a way if everyone was to think of work in this particular manner, then the competition might be less.

However the culture that precedes us and which had been made by us, motivates and sometimes even corrupts us to think of occupation as the most important aspect in our lives. It is no surprise that our entire educational system is shaped to make sure that there is cut throat completion so that a very, very few end up with a few recognized jobs. The time we spent at home or away from being very busy, made us realize that there are indeed more important aspects than work. We also realized that without our work the world went on just fine! Actually the world went on much better. We must give ourselves some time to realize that y our business of trying to change the world, made us forget the important things in life. Jesus himself explains this by saying ‘For

what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Mark 8.36.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What would be one change you would like to see in the world of work today?
2. If the entire world followed the above attitude, will discovery lack?
3. How can you improve work stress?

## 2. Knowledge, wisdom and knowing

### Portion – Chapter 1

<sup>12</sup> I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem,

<sup>13</sup> applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with.

<sup>14</sup> I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

<sup>16</sup> I said to myself, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.”

<sup>17</sup> And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a chasing after wind.

### Commentary

We find in this portion the single most used phrase in this book ‘chasing after wind’ and would want to think what exactly this means. Chasing after wind is futile, not probably because wind is intangible, if that was not so

all life would fail. But its an energy consuming task that reaps at the most comical benefits. The teacher brings forward a few reasons as to why this phrase is used here. The teacher is unhappy because of the task God has given to humans. The business one must do is unhappy. Humans spend much time on making things right and rejoicing in what is right in the world. Unfortunately both these aspects bring problems. Trying to correct things is of no use and thinking of what is right in the world is equally fruitless. As the reader we get a very dim picture of what is actually wrong with the world.

It grows even dimmer when the teacher explains that this came into the mind of the teacher after much rigorous use of the same mind. Which may direct us to think that the teacher is not only a philosopher but also learned on the affairs of the world. The speaker has spent much time on observing even researching, the affairs that happen under heaven. The conclusion is not made out of despair or a mere experience. It is said with much information that makes the reader feel the futility of trying to change the world as it is. The summary of this



is that the teacher now explains that even knowing things are but a waste of time. Knowledge and discovery are but vanity, and it does not serve any purpose. In the world where we live that thirsts for knowledge, is refuted by the teacher as it brings no joy and it brings no madness.

### **Exposition**

In this first chapter, we see this conclusion being reached after the teacher's intense pursuit of what has been visible in that particular context. Obviously this intimates to us the reader that the writer is using a certain criteria to proceed in this reasoning. The use of the teacher's 'mind' is an important aspect in this entire book. Is he or she saying that this is the limit of my mind and from what I can know, the work of life itself is futile. Or is the teacher saying here that while he or she has acquired so much experience and wisdom, that itself is enough for the teacher to come to an explanation of life as, God given.

However we also see the words, God has given this unhappy business. In that way we can understand that, the teacher has read the intention of God. Therefore, continuing from the section above, the business that we busy ourselves with is futile. It makes us unhappy, is in vain and is a mere chasing after wind, which is also a useless task. And most importantly, we are given this task by God! This would certainly raise a few eye brows, both of Christians as well as others. Especially knowing that our world itself is defined by the amount of work we put in regardless of the field. The teacher exhausts at the end of the first chapter, giving to us the reader something that he or she has discovered; that while the option of work is open to us, if we do pursue it, it is only pain; the striking words of ‘For in much wisdom is much vexation, and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow’.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Have you felt that rush towards knowledge has made our world overly complicated and competitive?

2. If at all humans were to spend time in not being busy, will it be an ultimate loss?
3. Did the pandemic show the lack of knowledge or the shortcoming of same?

### **3. Wealth, Riches and Luxuries**

#### **Portion – Chapter 2**

<sup>2</sup> I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?”

<sup>9</sup> So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem; also my wisdom remained with me.

<sup>10</sup> 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 my reward for all my toil.

<sup>11</sup> Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind,<sup>[b]</sup> and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

#### **Commentary**

We might be too easily put off when we come to this third reflection, when thinking of further aspects that seem like of no use. And in this case it is every luxury. It may also go to show the exact lifestyle and extravagance the teacher was involved with during his or her duration.

From gardens to servants to pleasures of every kind the list is quite blown out. Almost all type of human temptation is included in this list. By today's standard it is a billionaire life style. Did the teacher engage in these for pleasure and luxury sake? Or was he or she trying to find something more through these extravagances?

However we could understand that luxuries alone are not enough for happiness. Yet this exasperation comes from the connection that the teacher has toiled hard to get all these pleasures, and the question he or she poses is was it worth it? And the answer is No.

If we were to ask anyone who labours as there is no tomorrow as to why they do all this work, the answer is exactly for tomorrow. Or rather to spend tomorrow better than how they spend today. But according to the wise teacher, if we spend all our time accumulating these pleasures, it is not going to help us. Even the mental wellness giving laughter is not of profit. It does seem that even happiness for which people struggle so hard is not of use. We think whether this conclusion comes when luxury is gained for luxury's sake. For an example

we like to eat good food, as it makes us enjoy it. So there can't be a divide between enjoying luxury but not working towards it.? Almost at all times it is much better to enjoy something one has worked hard towards rather than not. However we do run into some interpretation issues when we label it in that way.

### **Exposition**

Luxury is a heavy hardened word in modern consumerism. You can end by buying some item which is ten times worth to a similar item having the same functions. There is a high end market for luxury in everything. Here we must think what leads the teacher to label luxuries as a chasing behind the wind. A few logical points are that, over time luxury may use its value. Even luxury is susceptible towards this. Another would be over indulgence. As the teacher puts it, no pleasure was kept away from him or her. This can point us in the direction of addiction or wanting too much just to keep the taste buds in interest. Thirdly that luxury takes so much stress out of you and at the end even if the pleasures are pleasurable, it just does not make the cut in

to what you put in. With the covid crisis, we as a world learned that what we knew as luxury will never be the same again. This rude awakening was made reality when almost all the factors of luxury were closed or restricted. Even the great food we enjoyed was not accessible. We learned that smaller negligible things became our luxury. Maybe for more persons than not this was our reality. Even breathing became a luxury. In a way is the philosopher putting us in more conflict by saying that humanity should not gain more luxury than is necessary or luxury ruins the real things in life?

It is a hard question than we might think. Because when one searches luxury it makes more others lose out even on the basics. And finally when you are there, it seems that there are still a few more notches luxury can go up and then you go in search of it. In a way even our passions and loves must come under a certain measuring rod. When Jesus overcame the first temptation we realize that bread was not the issue here. It was the attachment we have for material things which gives us a small pleasure than spiritual thirst of God.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How much of our time and energy is absorbed in luxury?
2. Is luxury an addiction or a necessity?
3. Is luxury making an unequal society?



## 4. Occupation and Pleasing God

### Portion – Chapter 2

<sup>22</sup> What do mortals get from all the toil and strain with which they toil under the sun?

<sup>23</sup> For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest. This also is vanity.

<sup>24</sup> There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God;

<sup>25</sup> for apart from him<sup>[d]</sup> who can eat or who can have enjoyment?

<sup>26</sup> For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God.

### Commentary

The lamentation of the teacher continues, and his or her accusation against persons who are obsessed with work. Maybe the understanding is that when we labour too

much the result is pain. And we never have commensurate results for what we put in. And we end up getting angered and having no peace at night. Probably the one who states that ‘the greatest wealth in the world is a good nights sleep’ is in alignment with the teachers philosophy. However, there is a surprising phrase that occurs with ‘find enjoyment in their toil’ . So there could be some enjoyment as long as, and as the author specifies it, when it is from the hand of God. Therefore work itself while being addictive, is by no means bad by our own evaluation standards. God approves work and God gives enjoyment in the labour we put in.

Maybe the problem is not work at all. Maybe its just as verse 25 says, enjoyment lies with God and no other. So whatever we may choose to do , can either be made positive or negative. And there is one easy way of enjoying our work and the fruits of its labour. And that is to please God. Please God even in our labour. When the attention of work is to please ourselves, then the objective is lost. But when the focus is on God and doing God’s mission in our work then there is reciprocation

from God. And similarly the unwise person ends up heaping and gathering but this labour is in vain. In that way we understand that God's intention is present in work we do, and this may include all aspects of work. However the way we choose to perform it results in how we feel afterward.

### **Exposition**

The biggest fear for most countries when shutting down due to the pandemic was really an economical one. We might have thought it could be a health issue. But as we know most people feared losing a job, money and businesses rather than one's health. It is very clear to see the relation to this fear. We cannot imagine a world without labour and work. In fact we have made it our prime object from the time of waking to make sure that we earn enough, work hard enough and make the world founded on the occupations we do and how much we earn. For our shock when we had to halt everything and things got restricted more and more, we had to realize did we miss it all anyway? Obviously persons would have been fed up with staying at home doing nothing.

Yet the shock of staying away from hard routines was enough to make us realize that the world did not rotate on the work we do. Rather we found the break more comforting than the occasional weekend. We did see that the medical profession who were taxed the most, still would resound the above sentiment that what was the joy of all the work they did? It was also a time where we might have been more happy with the supporting work we did; we had more time now to look at charity or helping the other.

In a way this falls into the idea of pleasing God. And in this task at least we received happiness. We stopped exploiting ourselves and the world. There were also conspiracies that this pandemic was made possible by exactly the exploitation of resources. And we realize that at the end, is it possible for anyone caught up in this madness to say that they enjoyed their labour. But as soon as we reopen we went on to work as robots, the education completion restarted, the sadness in this story is that it is still an unlearned lesson for many.

### **Questions for Reflections**

1. Is it possible to enjoy current occupations?
2. What kind of lessons do we impact on young minds when we look at back at the pandemic through the angle of work?
3. When billionaires increased their wealth during this time and more people left for poverty can we allude that they were sinners?

## 5. Work Life and Godliness

### Portion – Chapter 3

<sup>11</sup> He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

<sup>12</sup> I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live;

<sup>13</sup> moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil.

<sup>14</sup> I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him.

<sup>15</sup> That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

### Commentary

Just after that beautiful poem, of the timings of each aspect of life, the teacher continues to describe his/her researched experiences. And the first sentence itself

makes us realize the core premise in this argument. While God know the time for everything, and while God has put that sense into our human minds, we are but unable to find God's way. In a way our theologizing is a failure. We can even say that we are unable to theologize as we are now dealing with something much larger than human knowledge; and that is God. Therefore just as other animals and plant life, we are called to enjoy the mercies of God rather than aim to change the course of life. And why should'nt we do it? The teacher says that God's gifts us the food and drink and even our toil. And in this case toil comes across as what we do in to order to survive.

As the next sentence goes, what has been made cannot be changed and nothing can be taken away or added to it. In a similar way what can be done in terms of discovery or feats, is already present. Here it might help us understand that what this means is not that different versions come about of the same aspect. For an example we wear much different shoes now that hundred years back and in another hundred it will again change, yet the

concept and framework remain the same. This can also lead to us think of theological models of interpretation where, some deem Biblical inferences as in the 'past' but nothing of what the world has now is in it. Yet in principle what must be said has already been said in the word of God. The doubters also raise issue as it boils down to following and its implications which are hard.

### **Exposition**

The one who thinks of a proud history or proud future both fail. God demands awe from his creation, not a deliberate distortion to it. In the pandemic there was such a freedom we allowed creation that actually the environment got better and cleaner. With several pinpoints coming in the direction of natural tampering of species led to the pandemic, also made us realize how much of a serious stage we are in, in terms of achievement. We also hear of the many natural disasters that come about, which are actually human made. All these transpire from greed, exploitation and violation which end up making the world a much sadder place. And in this regard the world means the non human



world. And when you start to imagine us as animalkind itself, the situation just gets cleared up so well! Its probably true that we are the most intelligent of life forms on the planet, but that just does not make us better or elevated than other life forms. Especially on cases of biology, sustainability, disasters, survival etc we just keep getting 'caged' into the same category of animalkind. Therefore the continuance of the species becomes so intricately joined with accepting that the environment precedes our survival.

There cannot be a future without the human species understanding this most important fact. It is rather surprising to see that we engage everyday as if this means nothing to us. And when we see how much we fight with nature we see how much of a caring phenomenon the nature actually is, and bursts into disaster at its most difficult stage. We find solace when we are surrounded by this environment and that itself explains to us that we are merely another species of animals dependent on so many aspects that we receive from this planet. The more we are able to be one with is

concept the more our minds are freed and we become able to see God's goodness in every minute details around us. We become equal with all creation and not overlords of it.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Is it possible to serve God and a world or work?
2. Do you think people have changed their mind about the world of work after the pandemic?
3. How does a Christian inculcate this concept in his/her work ethic?

## **6. Righteousness and the Peace of God**

### **Portion – Chapter 3**

6. <sup>16</sup> Moreover I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well.

<sup>17</sup> I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work.

<sup>18</sup> I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals.

<sup>19</sup> For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity.

<sup>20</sup> All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.

### **Commentary**

The tone of the teacher now turns into a different mode. Earlier we saw the emphasis going from labour to luxury to the environment and then to the human existence. In

the first line of this passage we find that it is now directed at justice and injustice. The teacher explains that in his/her long observance he or she has found that wickedness has overtaken justice and righteousness. The teacher goes on to show that while the belief of God judging both the good and the bad, humans are not to expect a higher place on the judgement scale, just because we are human beings. This is a quite revelatory statement as humans have a better sense of right and wrong with their enhanced brain capacities yet they if they get it wrong they are not going to have an easier time. And this thought gets developed with the life spans, characteristics and composition been mentioned that leads to the ultimate measurement of all life beings.

Then the teacher brings a quite baffling point of where all life ends up, first as dust but then they all go to one 'place'. It is not clear whether this means the physical composition or rather the soul of the person. However the teacher does not make it unclear as the teaching goes on. But rather says that humans have no advantage over

animals even in the ultimate mission of life which is a better afterlife.

### **Exposition**

There are many theological dilemmas, but not quite one that makes theologizing ability become no advantage over than another life being! But that itself points us to a very valid point in our journey of theological thought. If we continue to say that we are smarter animals then also it must be reflected in our work on this earth. At the moment no animals seeks detriment to the world than the human animal. Imagine the attempt we make from the time we get up till we tuck in for the night and its impact on the world and animals. And we naturally question, whether this is the injustice that is talked about here by the teacher.

There is less room for justice and righteousness in a situation that makes us, human beings over tax the world around us. The pandemic first had a rumour that it was initiated in the human quest to change the basic building blocks of life. Whether this is true or not is not possible

to be debated here. Yet we know without a doubt that we are at a time where we are challenging even the basics of life. And nature itself has not let us get away with it. In the midst of these devastations of the pandemic we did start to realize this more and more. It called for us to realize the ‘life’ which we share with animals and plants around us. This emphasis came to us in such a excruciatingly painful way, it made us wake up suddenly. But then to see those who were already of this mind did much better in this coping. Especially for city dwellers and those who were obsessed with exploring the earth for profit were naturally the hardest hit. In that regard we started to realize that even with all our advancements we are destined to be dust in the end. Yet the quest to be ‘not so’ vulnerable is also back on. And in this ungratefulness we confide.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What were the short term and long term losses you felt during the pandemic?
2. Would it be possible to say that most people from poorer background faced the pandemic differently?

3. Is the vaccination drive another loop hole for human delusion?

## **7. Justice of God and Injustice of Humans**

### **Portion – Chapter 4**

Again I saw all the oppressions that are practiced under the sun. Look, the tears of the oppressed—with no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power—with no one to comfort them.

<sup>2</sup> And I thought the dead, who have already died, more fortunate than the living, who are still alive;

<sup>3</sup> but better than both is the one who has not yet been, and has not seen the evil deeds that are done under the sun.

<sup>4</sup> Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from one person's envy of another. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind

### **Commentary**

In this speech the teacher touches on a very sensitive aspect. While it is not mentioned by the term, the discussion here focuses on justice. The teacher explains how the powerful and the powerless both become cemented in their nature, yet they find no consolation.



We can think of this as a signaling of the teacher of these happenings as unjust. Not only are the oppressed unable to control their oppression, but the oppressed cannot control being oppressed. There was no one to alleviate this suffering to either party; and what a sad thing to be said, when we forget about celebrating life but rather wishing one were dead. And even more so the one who has not been born! Since what the dead and living see is horrendous. The final sentence is even more striking than the above. The teacher builds a theory in which all our work comes only to compete. Come to think of it, it does not necessarily seem relevant.

Yet when we reflect a bit more deeply we can understand that the implication here is that toil happens to make sure that one enjoys success. And this we can relate to in our modern world. We seem to select a few industries that pay well and make sure that all jump on the same bandwagon. Inevitably we all come under a rat race, we might even forget the advancement of each subject area.

**Exposition**

Justice was certainly an issue that propped up throughout this time. On one hand we saw vaccine politicization with rich nations and then with the powerful in countries. Then it was the turn of the rich who had access to all sorts of defense mechanisms that they used to live in a separate world away from the pandemic. When the poor and the lowly struggled with wages, jobs, violence at home the affluent had a buffer on each aspect. We saw that in almost every issue, the rich and the powerful made away. Just because they were rich it is unfair to term them as wicked. But if it does involve power and this was misused, the term wicked is a suitable one. The teachers observation is that this indeed was ‘way of the world’ from its beginning. This of course raise the doubt of God’ justice against this injustice of humans.

However we find through history the evil of humans has never been in short supply and perhaps at the end there maybe some solace but generally the presence of injustice is a given. It may be the foil for which calls everyone to be just. However in this pandemic we saw

that injustice prevailed especially over the vulnerable. This came to us through terrible scenes that will be etched in our memory. Obviously we also saw the signs of the good. We also saw how many helped with the pandemic sometime risking their lives. The teacher's admonition of wickedness could also be equaled to the pandemic. This wickedness claimed the lives of many and most, it can be said of the lowly and humble. In terms of the language in this passage these are the persons who can be termed as the righteous. Then in all this we question ourselves, what hope? What deters us in seeing hope in this matter, is wickedness itself. As the teacher found out that there was no blessing in the life spent, we find Jesus living that same life but giving us a different admonition. In this Jesus' guidance is to make this world a heaven itself. In the Lord's prayer we pray this. Jesus also gives us citizenship of another world, whatever might come to this world. If for the former we are called to make sure that wickedness does not make life a sorry take. The oppressors as well as the oppressed inherit the world in equality.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Did the pandemic make newer justice issues?
2. Was polarization present in terms of justice issue?
3. What is the role of human institutions in withholding God's justice?

## 8. Community to the Rescue

### Portion –Chapter 4

<sup>12</sup>And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

<sup>13</sup>Better is a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king, who will no longer take advice.

<sup>14</sup>One can indeed come out of prison to reign, even though born poor in the kingdom.

<sup>15</sup>I saw all the living who, moving about under the sun, follow that youth who replaced the king

<sup>16</sup>there was no end to all those people whom he led. Yet those who come later will not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind

### Commentary

It certainly seems like the teacher is expressing several aspects of life mainly in terms of symbols. At first it is unity or community. It can even mean team work. Then the mood changes to governance. Here it is more like who is the worthy? Considering all what has gone before the teacher turns this on its head by saying that a person

from the ground, street smart maybe a better option than one who had his/her feet in the clouds. Next strikingly one's character is described. Prison and the Palace. This is even against his own coronation that made it possible for royal blood to be in the rulership. Then he links this to say that the common man and woman always follows the leader from the ground. However there is always a twist in the tale in the teachings of the wise one! And in this case it is whether you rule from above or from the ground with regard to one/s background, there is no guarantee that there will be a followership in eternity. In a way the teacher now comes to describes psychology, politics, economics, sociology and even anthropology through this brief statement.

The human always has a problem with human leaders. Like in the youth there is a chance that popularity can linger for some time, yet then comes the distraught. Humans cannot be pleased at all times and the one who believes it to be so, falls into the trap of chasing the wind of popularity.

**Exposition**

There are several themes of interest this short passage. The first one is the support of community. If we ever started missing the concept of community it was during this pandemic. We came so struck by the abstract loneliness that we might have even felt upto some level, delusional. We even hear of young children who have had trauma that has affected them in negative ways even to this day. The next theme is of course foolishness. This has become so commonplace that, in the developing countries this has been the main cause of infection and deaths.

The foolishness of persons who are unable to heed any sort of advise end up making the entire state ill. The prison depiction is interesting in that the teacher convinces the reader that the background related to the leadership is null and void. However there is always a twist with the teacher and in this case, the teacher piles the vanity of the situation not the person but on the context that comes later who does not remember him or her. A stark reminder in this case may come actually to

Solomon or maybe to his son, especially with the rallying of the youth. But we do find even in our day and age, leaders who have probably lost their leadership skills in the wind and not much of them is impressed upon. The sad story of the pandemic has been leaders who were foolish and stubborn to take the mechanism of delivery away from their self centered goals. And in this quest, the leaderships have claimed more lives than in an unnatural calamity.

### **Questions for Reflections**

1. Did you change your perspective on community in this time?
2. How did stories of community building that encourage you?
3. Will community become a moment or a part of culture in the coming years?



## 9. Peace of Mind

### Portion – Chapter 5

<sup>10</sup> The lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain. This also is vanity.

<sup>11</sup> When goods increase, those who eat them increase; and what gain has their owner but to see them with his eyes?

<sup>12</sup> Sweet is the sleep of laborers, whether they eat little or much; but the surfeit of the rich will not let them sleep.

<sup>13</sup> There is a grievous ill that I have seen under the sun: riches were kept by their owners to their hurt,

<sup>14</sup> and those riches were lost in a bad venture; though they are parents of children, they have nothing in their hands.

### Commentary

The teacher gives us a background on economics in this case. The attitude of the rich has been a constant discussion in the pandemic. We do hear of how hoarding went around, currently we faced the black market phenomenon in the country. According to the teacher;

As they came from their mother's womb, so they shall go again, naked as they came; they shall take nothing for their toil, which they may carry away with their hands. Further on the hoarding on the other side by the consumer has made the gaps widen , once again making the same sort of groups. And with this, to the end of the rich they have not gained much by this exercise, while the underprivileged have been able to at least enjoy some peace.

The final sentence omitted from here resounds, Job and also the foolish man who went on building barns in the gospel. And it concludes, all the riches that we utilize for our end and for the detriment or happiness of others , is not our possession at all. The more we can keep away from the attraction the better we might have a good nights sleep.

### **Exposition**

Our question of course, was this true in the recent pandemic? Or is this just delusional talk by the teacher? Who we know had more than anyone else but seems to

have had a change of heart and mind after seeing the challenges around both economically, sociologically and psychologically. A way of understanding the focus of this passage is to look at it from the mental perspective of either the rich or the poor.

When the pandemic was causing havoc the rich still gained and the poor still lost, by looking at how billionaires fared in it all. However the mental condition of once who had little and was on the verge of risking it versus the rich whose riches were compromised was quite wide. This itself is a situation in which the poor score a win over the rich. And there were also stories in which the rich were not saved by riches but the poor were able to survive through large scale welfare programmes. Could this be the core message that the teacher is trying to give us? The rich try many different ways to increase their wealth but it loses out when the end nears.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Did we see economic justice or economic nightmares in this pandemic?
2. What is the role of power and what is the role of spirituality in this discussion?
3. Do you feel the rich actually has this much considerations that their disposal?

## 10. Holistic Wellness

### Portion – Chapter 5

<sup>6</sup> This also is a grievous ill: just as they came, so shall they go; and what gain do they have from toiling for the wind?

<sup>17</sup> Besides, all their days they eat in darkness, in much vexation and sickness and resentment.

<sup>18</sup> This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot.

<sup>19</sup> Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God.

<sup>20</sup> For they will scarcely brood over the days of their lives, because God keeps them occupied with the joy of their hearts.

**Commentary**

The teacher now takes on the role of a wellness coach. And in this short description he or she describes spirit, mental and physical well being all three in one. First the mental wellness is described in the realization of the limited scope of the human. While we reach for the stars we end up losing the mental shoe leather by all the journeying we do. The spiritual is the feeling of God's grace that surpasses everything. "God gives" is a wonderful slogan to be in and out of bed every day.

And the physical aspect which we came upon more than ever in this time of crisis. While we do assign little or no reference to the physical wellbeing, we all realized how good it is to be fit and healthy. So the teacher says enjoy the toil, maybe it's a walk, a hobby, recreation as well and to be happy in food and drink, not in overindulgence but in satisfaction.

**Exposition**

A poignant aspect that was brought forward in these reflections, is how much we started valuing our health

when we did have imagery of disturbance and death. A theological point of physical fitness is brought out in these few lines, where it is God who gives us happiness in the 'toil' which must then be equated to the joy in our hearts that God gives through it. To simplify it, we become aware of labour and toil as things that God gives us to be happy and content. And when we talk of labour and toil we realize that the treadmill and weights became reality, only a few decades ago, but people lived disease free lives through the toil of the land.

These agricultural communalities eventually led to the civilizations that we are all part of. So the one who makes physical fitness a human element may only be motivated by the magazines and supplement industry, but in a deeper level, just resembling the 'temple of God' we are called to care for our fitness in the same manner that it is God's gift. The authors explain that the more we realize labour as pleasing in the sight of God, but with the other retractions already discussed, we become content in holiness.

**Questions for Reflection**

1. Was it possible to look at all types of wellness in this crisis duration?
2. How much of a crisis is evolving, in the generations ahead with imbalanced lifestyles?
3. Did we learn the value of mental and spiritual wellness in this time?



## 11. Appreciating everything

### Portion – Chapter 6

<sup>3</sup> A man may beget a hundred children, and live many years; but however many are the days of his years, if he does not enjoy life's good things, or has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he.

<sup>4</sup> For it comes into vanity and goes into darkness, and in darkness its name is covered;

<sup>5</sup> moreover it has not seen the sun or known anything; yet it finds rest rather than he.

<sup>6</sup> Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to one place?

<sup>7</sup> All human toil is for the mouth, yet the appetite is not satisfied.

### Commentary

This passage on the concept of enjoying life's good things, builds on some of the other passages we heard right through the book. One will wonder how many themes on the same topic the teacher builds upon! Yet each one differs slightly but holds a common platform.

In this it is like saying that life has so much good things to offer, however takes leave of naming these. Therefore the reader feels the doubt of whether it is power and position or the values of the kingdom like love, peace, joy etc.

The teacher goes onto to say that a still born is better because he or she would not have been aware of the riches of the life, so then it is better for someone who didn't know to take leave of it rather than the one who knows of it and spends time not realizing it.

The teacher gives time; that most valuable aspect, even if it is in abundant supply but the person does not realize the importance of the riches of life, the that life is not well spent.

### **Exposition**

In the pandemic we have established the need of all humanity to appreciate life and to live their best. We saw how much things could change from us who chased secular dreams and it was horrible to see persons confess that all their lives might have been a waste if not if one

had enjoyed life. Actually most of the people around us which includes us as well, will look at life at the end of sixty or seventy years and realize this must be the time we must start enjoying life as we have missed so much! Alas we find this at a very later stage and the ones who do find it very early, usually end up being miserable as they don't have an established life at sixty or seventy!

I guess nothing more to add rather than vanity of vanities! The author's stark contrast on the last line that we work only for the food, but food does not satisfies, makes us realize that the author has been stressing only the things of life as Godly rather than earthly, all along. What a fitting way for the teacher to make the beginning end and the middle of the book run through this important message.

### **Questions for Reflections**

1. Did you think of time as more valuable in the midst of this pandemic?
2. Do you feel the general population has understood valuing time at any cost?

3. How was your time management during this pandemic?

## 12. Growing in Awareness

### Portion – Chapter 7

<sup>10</sup> Do not say, “Why were the former days better than these?”

For it is not from wisdom that you ask this.

<sup>11</sup> Wisdom is as good as an inheritance,  
an advantage to those who see the sun.

<sup>12</sup> For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money,

and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom gives life to the one who possesses it.

<sup>13</sup> Consider the work of God;  
who can make straight what he has made crooked?

<sup>14</sup> In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.

### Commentary

The first few lines which precede verse ten, are proverbial resounding of the two polar discussion that

has run through the reflection. The teacher makes sure to remind us that on the polar of satisfaction and yearning we continue to find sorrow while on the polar of sadness even if not for immediate gain it yields happiness in the end. And now in this passage the polar ends dwell on wisdom and ignorance. The teacher compares wisdom to an inheritance. It becomes life giving according to the text and must be held dear like treasure.

However the term is differentiated from knowledge, where we measure some pre existing information. And the teacher gives really no room of survival for the one without this treasure; for the one who has wisdom would know the how one should act and the one without, clueless. An also here wisdom is theistic, God is in the picture of wisdom. In a way knowing God is wisdom.

### **Exposition**

In the past few months we had many theological debates and discussions on the pandemic. More than ever in the recent past persons tired to bring our newer theologies to combat the onset. Some, went to the distance of

eschatological proportions to prove that the pandemic was a curse. In a way the one who has read the Bible with devotion but critically, know that there really isn't must to ponder here anew. In the words of the teacher, nothing new has come into being. There is certainly a gap that was made by the ones who had knowledge of the situation and interpreted it extravagantly in terms of hermeneutical catastrophe.

Yet for the one with wisdom this was just another calamity, human made at all costs, and its cure lay firmly once again with humanity. And then we saw how ignorant leaders behaved, costing more lives of people. We continue to see how people themselves have advocated for remaining in the pandemic than lose their free will. All in all, we beheld a time of polarization, among the ones who comprehended the situation and the ones who remain incomprehensible, even to this day. To think of Jesus when he said that people could read signs of the skies but would not be able to read the signs of the times, resounds firmly with this. His call for repentance also resound similarly where the pharisaic led factions

never understood what emanated without the Law. And in the end love triumphed law.

### **Questions for Reflections**

1. Did you come across alternative theologies in the discussion of the pandemic?
2. How well were they founded on personal gain or not?
3. Is it possible to comprehend this happening in a one way theology ?



### **13. Whither of Knowing**

#### **Portion – Chapter 7**

<sup>21</sup> Do not give heed to everything that people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you;

<sup>22</sup> your heart knows that many times you have yourself cursed others.

<sup>23</sup> All this I have tested by wisdom; I said, “I will be wise,” but it was far from me.

<sup>24</sup> That which is, is far off, and deep, very deep; who can find it out?

<sup>25</sup> I turned my mind to know and to search out and to seek wisdom and the sum of things, and to know that wickedness is folly and that foolishness is madness

#### **Commentary**

This passage ends with the solemn warning, that God made human beings straightforward, but they have devised many schemes. It does seem that this is the cream of what the teacher is attempting to lead his or her readers. While wisdom is paramount, wickedness is also abundant in human affairs. This is where we find ourselves

who have cursed others because of the wickedness within us. Even though we wait upon the still small voice of God, much louder derailing sounds surround us to make us vulnerable. In this the overload of information is a possibility.

The teacher explains that this overload may leads the leaders to be cursed by the ones who look upto them. It leads persons to think they are wise but that is a delusion as well. And in the centre of it all, the teacher finds that wickedness and madness is well and alive in all of us. And some of this goes out to distort all matters of life.

### **Exposition**

It is not at all wrong to state that during this pandemic, humanity went through the crisis of all media. On one hand we had nothing much to do than browse on it, and on the other to be motivated, brought down or informed through it. The use of information, for whatever reason that can be come up, was a strong proponent in the new normal that took place. Also this was taken to another level by persons both, of a faith nature and those with

secular goals to term a frame this pandemic in different lights. This includes theologies that were stretched beyond reason and movements that claimed controversies of political, ethnic, social and cultural sources. We questioned on the ‘wisdom’ that itself has made media and technology be present in such a way as we find it in the modern day.

However, we also find that it is the same wisdom that has become detrimental to the fabric of life with much fakeness. While we cannot envision that the teacher spoke of this idea with the modern issues at moment, underlying it, we do find human wickedness running through each and every human sphere and space. Developing wisdom within this time has also been difficult, especially when we think of the mentality of all of us, in this crisis time. It has been easy for unreliable sources to sway our minds during this time. The teacher expresses concern that we need to search and seek wisdom in the midst of these testings.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Did media make its mark in this pandemic?
2. How well were you able to filter the information overload?
3. What actions can be taken to manage overload in Christian circles?

## 14. Human Authority and God's Guidance

### Portion – Chapter 8

<sup>5</sup> Whoever obeys a command will meet no harm, and the wise mind will know the time and way.

<sup>6</sup> For every matter has its time and way, although the troubles of mortals lie heavy upon them.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, they do not know what is to be, for who can tell them how it will be?

<sup>8</sup> No one has power over the wind<sup>[b]</sup> to restrain the wind,<sup>[c]</sup> or power over the day of death; there is no discharge from the battle, nor does wickedness deliver those who practice it.

<sup>9</sup> All this I observed, applying my mind to all that is done under the sun, while one person exercises authority over another to the other's hurt.

### Commentary

Commands were very common in the past few months. On a global scale there were widespread protests against vaccinations to lockdowns. The teacher does not side with either part of commanders or the obeying parties.

But he or she makes another category who are the 'wise'. The wise do not need to be told everything, but both the rulers and subjects need these lectures. Talking to these two groups is useless. In this country we encountered protests from many groups, and then the protests were aimed always at the ruling party. This back and forth went and is still going on to this day.

This has affected, the life as we know it within each and every societal strand. The teacher compares this to wind, no one has power over it and restraining it is impossible. Towards the end the teacher explains that rulers always have the edge over the people as position- ally they enjoy higher power resources. The teacher explains that people in the end always suffer and are hurting by these commands.

### **Exposition**

In these reflections we are yet to talk of the governance aspect. This cannot be alienated at any costs, since people ended up suffering much more if the rulership has ceased their plundering of economical freedom. For the

benefit of their own policies we saw how the country went on unheeded and in this regard many more lost employment and lives. In the end, this time was used to bring in immediate measures which were anti people friendly. Crackdowns and detainment, which were also for the benefit of rulers were imposed, even when requested by many parties. We then question as to where the 'wise' were present in this scenario.

Can it be the ones who heeded everything as its mentioned or the ones who had a different way of thinking than what was proposed? Maybe it were the ones who reserved judgement for God on the evil that were brought upon. It may not be easy for them who thought in this way to explain as to why they kept quiet in everything and endured hurt. When looking at the general sentiment of the people who were aghast at how rulers tightened their pockets in this process, we can certainly see that some sort of mind transformation has taken place from them.

### **Questions for Reflections**

1. Did governance enter household conversation in this time?
2. What was the role of Christian leadership towards governance.?
3. How much of an effect was felt by governance throughout the world with the continuing unrest?



## 15. Human Nature and Perfection

### Portion – Chapter 8

<sup>12</sup> Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him,

<sup>13</sup> but it will not be well with the wicked, neither will they prolong their days like a shadow, because they do not stand in fear before God.

<sup>14</sup> There is a vanity that takes place on earth, that there are righteous people who are treated according to the conduct of the wicked, and there are wicked people who are treated according to the conduct of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity.

<sup>15</sup> So I commend enjoyment, for there is nothing better for people under the sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves, for this will go with them in their toil through the days of life that God gives them under the sun.

## **Commentary**

The teacher now starts a related issue on the wickedness and righteousness of people. While Ecclesiastes came into being in a totally different environment, unhindered by the current issue we face, the similarities of every aspect that the teacher deals with has surprising likeness. In the first hand the projection that the wicked can get away with anything. Secondly, the fate of the righteous is discussed. Thirdly how the wickedness permeate the general life and how righteousness fights its own battles against a darker force.

The teacher in his ir her great wisdom proposes that there is not too much benefit in trying to prove either polar, and recommends that one go through life with enjoyment. However there is not a mention of how this must take place. It looks likes that persons must enjoy to their benefit and probably not from what that can be gained from others. Its difficult to understand if the teacher was aiming at all people generally. But he or she proposes the basics in enjoyment.

**Exposition**

Enjoyment was one that we had the least in the past two years or so. The over spending culture of enjoyment were halted all across the country and the even the world. In this regard, we did hear of groups who still tried to further heir interests mostly in business gains. But generally most tried to make ends meet while being at home. This was not easy. It was plagued with mental distress, stress, anxiety and certainly what was missing was enjoyment.

Some of course found enjoyment in sharing And some in caring. Which itself was blessing. There was no mental space to think of the larger picture. The wicked had to take care of themselves and or did the righteous. In all this the teacher's advise is to look at how well our minds adapt to the situation. Enjoying in food and drink is permitted. While we may not do it when we know that many lack even this simple need. But is otherwise, the teacher explains to be happy in the simple things of life. Not to over think situations. As labour beckons you the

day ahead; just be happy with what you have been blessed with.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Was there a wave of righteous or wicked actions that stemmed in this duration?
2. Did this experience bring the best or the worst in humanity?
3. What were the ways in which you extended your mission support to those who needed it?

## 16. Nurturing Life

### Portion –Chapter 9

<sup>1</sup>All this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hate one does not know.

Everything that confronts them

<sup>2</sup> is vanity, since the same fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to those who sacrifice and those who do not sacrifice. As are the good, so are the sinners; those who swear are like those who shun an oath.

<sup>3</sup> This is an evil in all that happens under the sun, that the same fate comes to everyone. Moreover, the hearts of all are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they go to the dead.

<sup>4</sup> But whoever is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

<sup>5</sup> The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no more reward, and even the memory of them is lost

### **Commentary**

The ‘same fate comes to all’ seems to be the crux of this passage by the teacher. The teacher once again lays out how he or she comes to this conclusion at the beginning of the section itself. The righteous and the wicked are all in the same boat as we find in common language.

The divisions also stretch out to the good and the evil, the clean and the unclean (possibly to gentiles or other nations), those to sweat and those who don’t, and those who sacrifice and those who do not (a reference to (possibly discussing them that are away from the Law)). It’s not the best end goal to be righteous in this regard as all go to the dead. However there is some existentialism in play here as well, when life is regarded in high, and whoever it is that suffers the fate has still an option of hope.

### **Exposition**

The pandemic’s effect certainly did not care for any division or barrier. Rather it was an overall disaster which affected the ‘good’ more badly. But this of course

is human estimation. Its not easy to interpret on judgement, which is beyond human estimation.

However, we were not easily baffled by the fact that this pandemic out reached into every corner of the globe and everything that stood in its path was affected. There would have been the good who were trying to be good and the bad who were probably doing bad.

There was probably more in between as its always the case. But the crisis was real for all of us. In that way life itself became precious. It was a call to value life for both the wicked and the righteous. It was a call to live in the moment. Blessed is the one who would value life and do life giving things and woe to the one who may still have life bit continue life threatening activities. And that certainly goes to be a lesson learned in this struggle.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Did you find your community transforming into a life giving one?
2. At the same time were you surprised by the social evils that increased?

3. How did religiosity play a role in caring services?



## **17. Living in the Moment**

### **Portion –Chapter 9**

<sup>11</sup> Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all. <sup>12</sup> For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.

<sup>13</sup> I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. <sup>14</sup> There was a little city with few people in it. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. <sup>15</sup> Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man.

### **Commentary**

No one could have anticipated this pandemic. And from the teacher these same words have resounded for

millennia. While all continue to merry sway in their ways, when disaster strikes it takes each and every strata of society with it. The teacher pin points the mighty, the wise, the intelligent and the skillful, whom we presume were the most suitable to avoid a disaster. However it does not go well with them in times of trouble. The story of the wise king and the poor man is quite ironical.

This is because the gift of wisdom was held in high esteem by the teacher. However we can think of this as worldly wisdom, and when it comes to the wisdom of God, these bright sparks will not be remembered. On the other hand it also goes onto to describe humanity at its limitedness. We have not given importance to either human wisdom or God's wisdom. But go with ignorance all day long and throughout our lives. This is the vanity of life as the Teacher finds out in dealing with disasters.

### **Exposition**

Disasters do not come with invitation. And in cases such as the pandemic these sort were reserved only for blockbuster films. Yet in terms of effect the disaster baffled

many, It baffled the skilful the intelligent , the wise and probably everyone who came up with a theory as causal towards it.

When we look at human wisdom even at its very best and see how it fails over and over again, human achievement and its limitedness over and over again, the benefit of science which falls short over and over again, we come to the same conclusion of that as the teacher that human wisdom lies heavily on the low side than that of God's wisdom. The use of all accomplishments in life, and the talents that accompany would probably last a lifetime maybe a little longer but it may get forgotten. It gets forgotten exactly for the reason that the human is not convinced of realizing that God's wisdom is above them, but tries to counter it by their own merits.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Did this crisis make you think different on life/
2. How was your thinking sharpened with end of world theologies?

3. Do you feel that the Christian communities were enriched through this duration?

## 18. God's grace in human institutions?

### Portion –Chapter 10

<sup>5</sup> There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, as great an error as if it proceeded from the ruler:

<sup>6</sup> folly is set in many high places, and the rich sit in a low place.

<sup>7</sup> I have seen slaves on horseback, and princes walking on foot like slaves.

<sup>8</sup> Whoever digs a pit will fall into it;

and whoever breaks through a wall will be bitten by a snake.

<sup>9</sup> Whoever quarries stones will be hurt by them;

and whoever splits logs will be endangered by them.

<sup>10</sup> If the iron is blunt, and one does not whet the edge,

then more strength must be exerted; but wisdom helps one to succeed.,

### Commentary

If there was a sequel to the continuation from the earlier passage, then this must be a fitting companion. However the rhetoric changes, now into power. While many

maybe given authority and wisdom, and it is their prerogative to use it in whichever way as necessary. Yet the use of power becomes another topic altogether. The reference to the ruler and the warning at the end of the chapter, also related to the ruler, is a stark reminder of the use of power that is a constant in any context.

The work of the powerful has become folly and the persons who occupy the places of power are itself a folly. Three striking examples are given as to how this is equated. The first is digging ones own pit, the venom of snakes, the confusion in a quandary and the splitting of logs. These would have been the extra dangerous and self hurting experiences in that context. The powerful seem to be under the guise that the use of more power is the best in any case. Yet the teacher points out that wisdom trumps power.

### **Exposition**

The use of power in the developing world has not been stale news for any length of time. The work of those in power in times of good and mostly the bad by the use of

power is not a new matte either. The pandemic did see remarkable cases across the world on how the power of the rulers came under supposed rejection. And this also resulted in even more power being exerted, but this was the norm of the developing world. In the case of wisdom, if there seemed to one thing lacking in a pandemic response, it was probably this most important element. One may ask how this affects the common person.

In a way, it affects them with life and death. The more the people spend time in totally recognition of folly, then this translates into the disasters at all fronts. And in the midst of offering relief, the power that was entrusted becomes even devastating when the commoner deals with the ensuing disasters based on it. It will go on to show then the need of wisdom on the part of the ruled, in overcoming the results of the powerful.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. Did the stories of mis-management around the world intrigue you ?

2. If you were consulted on covid, what would be your suggestions?
3. Did the powerful feel the powerlessness in this crisis?



## 19. Managing one's self

### Portion –Chapter 11

<sup>1</sup>Divide your means seven ways, or even eight,  
for you do not know what disaster may happen on  
earth.

<sup>3</sup>When clouds are full,  
they empty rain on the earth;  
whether a tree falls to the south or to the north,  
in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.

<sup>4</sup>Whoever observes the wind will not sow;  
and whoever regards the clouds will not reap.

<sup>5</sup>Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the  
bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the  
work of God, who makes everything.

<sup>6</sup>In the morning sow your seed, and at evening do not let  
your hands be idle; for you do not know which will  
prosper, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.

### Commentary

In the past few months, we saw a cartoon which depicted  
four stages of person and had the heading, after the

lockdown you will either come out of it as a monk, hunk, drunk or chunk. While it was for humorous purposes, it carried much meaning. It was an eye opener on how much of what you were going to spend on the time you had and the resources you had. In the passage, the teacher gives a few important lessons on utilization. Firstly it is to share our time and resources evenly.

It would not mean that we are house bound or we have sporadic bursts into outside ventures. But we must utilize our moments carefully. Then we must see the signs, similarly to what Jesus bought upon the peoples on not minding the signs of the times. We went through a totally different patch of living and this we must comprehend. Next we are not to spend time in wasteful ignorance. We are called to utilize every bit of energy and resource for some sort of occupation.

### **Exposition**

We did see much mental agony that came upon many of us, as we could not return to the normal ways of life. And we did see how many faltered with the new normal

of actually wasting the time and energy that was present to us. Very few pounced on the opportunities to live a normal life with the new normal. It was a new experience to all of us.

Yet the one who ‘time managed’ and ‘self managed’ were able to come up trumps in this deal. We have always heard that the idle mind leads into so many issues both psychologically and physically, yet the ones who were able to keep the ‘open mind’ with engagement were able to normalize their presence within the pandemic. Some of course complained that the house boundedness led to more work and no idleness was found. However if this led to more time in front of a screen only, then again the division of work was not achieved. And this would lead into further mental agony, and this was present among many children and much effort is now being taken to rectify this issue.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. How did you manage your work during this time?

2. Was it challenging to be hearing of pain outside and within?
3. Did good management end in better productivity?

## **20. Wellness of the Mind**

### **Portion –Chapter 11**

<sup>7</sup> Light is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun.

<sup>8</sup> Even those who live many years should rejoice in them all; yet let them remember that the days of darkness will be many. All that comes is vanity.

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

<sup>10</sup> Banish anxiety from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

### **Commentary**

Even within the same chapter we find a sharp division in the thought of the teacher when he or she, starts commenting on the nature of life and why one should learn to be existential in our task of living. The example

of the sun is relevant to all of us. Sun here equates to the fuel for all life and with the morning and its rising the world happens. And in this the teacher admonishes also to see the other side of light which is darkness and how difficult it can be if, we live with this constant thought of destruction and fear. The call by the teacher is to be happy.

The young man symbolism could be that that demographic can suffer the most with the opposite for happiness of in general psychology, either older or younger persons would already have a grip on the meaning or no meaning of life. However, the real call here is not to be fancy about the benefits of youth as in that age we may overthink of all possibilities. And now then it must not be an anxious time.

### **Exposition**

The powerful were certainly laid low, in this drastic time duration we endured. Especially of the youth who had more aspirations than memories with loads of energy and excitement all felt the brunt of this situation when death

beckoned them all. Very few, if it can be justified were able to banish fear. The ones who were too brave all became humbled at this pandemic. The teacher is not totally unsympathetic to the needs of youth. He or she gently encourages them to enjoy with limitation, but to know well that it is not an end. The life must be lived. It must be lived through many more stages.

However youth or otherwise we need to learn to be existential in crises like this. We must learn to be blessed by the knowledge of everything that surrounds us and makes us live each day. When we do start to count our blessings we would be surprised at all what lied with us and what lies ahead. Even if our days circumstances are not too good, we always have hope and this hope keeps us alive. The anxiety that may spring from rejection of one's own circumstances will be the ultimate end.

### **Questions for Reflection**

1. What were the sources of encouragement at this time?
2. Was anxiety a constant at this time and how?
3. How did you manage mental wellness at this time?

## 21. God our Refuge

### Portion –Chapter 12

<sup>1</sup>Remember your creator in the days of your youth,  
before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near  
when you will say, “I have no pleasure in them”;

<sup>2</sup>before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars  
are darkened and the clouds return with<sup>[a]</sup> the rain;

<sup>3</sup>in the day when the guards of the house tremble, and  
the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease  
working because they are few, and those who look  
through the windows see dimly;

<sup>4</sup>when the doors on the street are shut, and the sound of  
the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a  
bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low;

<sup>5</sup>when one is afraid of heights, and terrors are in the  
road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags  
itself along<sup>[b]</sup> and desire fails; because all must go to  
their eternal home, and the mourners will go about the  
streets



### **Commentary**

Towards the end of the book, the theological crux is coming into being in a more visible manner. A theological interpretation of life is necessary even in the time when one might feel high and mighty as in his or her youth, so that one will not be dismayed as the portions explain of darkening and trembling. The terror is vividly described in the next few lines as well, with the panic on the streets, the sorrow at parties etc and the list goes on. And in the end the narration ends with all must return to God. In the epilogue the teacher concludes with another theological thrust, fear God and keep God's commandments, as there is a judgement that beckons us all.

### **Exposition**

While throughout this book a few terms made its rounds over and over again, they all were in different lights. And right now, all those streams of light seem to come together with the hope of giving the larger picture. And what a colourful picture it is at that ? It is simple but not simplistic. The idea of God as creator is seen across the

book yet there is no simple mechanism for God's creation to be one with God in a life full of complexities. On the other hand the audience deals with different perspective of life day in and day out. In the pandemic just like in all disaster, humanity was brought low in their humility. When they felt they were rulers and this was lost from them, they slowly realized that all along God was part of this and right now in the recover. Human arrogance and sin reaches such a high level that sometime we all may wonder where is God? Yet the answer is that God is ever present, observing God's creation makes numerous claims for God's absence and lift themselves to be the supernatural being. This always ends up in calamity. The teacher after studying too much probably! Gives us in summation not to overthink of this simple aspect but to take as it comes.

## **Further Study Notes I**

### *Chasing after a wind*

The book of Ecclesiastes appears in the Biblical canon among the wisdom and poetical books. It consists of twelve chapters and prominently features poetical verses such as 1.1-11, 15, 2.13-14, 3.1-8, 4.4-6, 7.1-13, 8.1, 9.17-18, 10.1-4/8-20, 11.2-4. It presents as mentioned elsewhere an admonition as from an individual who has matured beyond his/her age or has inclined more onto hold issues in life which are more delicate but have a rather deep rooted aura. Unlike the two books of Proverbs and the Song of Solomon this book does not begin with a preamble dedicating the work to Solomon and in this study even though authorship analysis may prove not to be helpful it may be more appropriate to allocate this writing to even someone of a more higher wisdom than that of Solomon which may become a fallacy when seeing that it was a gift which escalated in him more than anybody else in these times. However we are open into believing that God' s wisdom is freely given to anybody who waits upon it and in this case any

secretary of the day who may be entitled to be called as a 'Royal Philosopher' could have been endowed with the gift of the Spirit to envision these secrets for posterity.

The first chapter begins as a summary of what is to follow throughout and highlights the fact that whatever may flow from now onwards is actually a reflection of the person which to him/her the reality of life has had a powerful effect. In this chapter the basic consideration is the futility in seeking wisdom. If at all this is attributed to Solomonic legacy this sounds either as a tearing of oneself from all potential or an attainment of a climax where an enlightened state has been achieved, both which after having a glance at Solomon's life becomes very much possible.

The second chapter stretches the futility of the search in self indulgences. And the next section introduces the first impression of a divine will that has to be adhered into so that the illusion of life can be transformed. The third chapter begins with the immortal poem of assigning time for every happening in life and ends with the task

assigned for each person allowing judgment to take place if this is not the case. The fourth chapter continues this theme and ends with accompaniment in life so that a communal spirit brings this goal ever so close.

The fifth chapter instructs in the virtues of reverence, humility and contentment which in turn also promises peace of mind. The sixth chapter becomes again a see saw scenario as the frustration of life can be viewed when desires are chased rather than the virtues above. A disillusioned view of life has been warned in the seventh chapter and is thus in concomitant relationship with the problems that are viewed as general in life.

The eighth chapter is devoted to the acceptance of authority in whichever way it transpires and the final vestment of Godly authority. The ninth chapter explains the key in taking hold of disaster in life and interpolates the need to depend on wisdom rather than on a practice built of human courage.

The tenth chapter solves another few riddles in life especially anger, sloth, curse and dissension whilst the eleventh and twelfth chapter praise the need of diligence and brings the admonition to a close using the two ends of life of infancy and adulthood.

## Further Study Notes II

As we are to select a few salient themes in this great literary work it may be pertinent to note that the term Quoheloth appears in several quotations which is in fact the Hebrew name for this certain book. The book itself has come under severe criticism for varied issues most prominent is that it does not codify a systematic thought and rather author or authors deal with things according to whims and fancies and makes all of it sound more serious than it appears. There is praise for the book as we may see from some of the commentators and some have described it as the most extraordinary book in the Bible. Therefore it is a fine line we are about to tread upon and in such it is best that we hold onto creativity that gives rise over a perennial view that seem to neglect the brilliance of this particular work.

‘Being’ is Essential

In Nihilism we come across an extreme view of philosophical subjugation that life itself is worthless and

meaningless. There is no objectivity in life and therefore the established rules of life developed over centuries are worthless and still meaningless. If we ever were to wonder why motor accidents happen perhaps on the roadside or elsewhere we would be more prejudicial in our judgment if we came to the conclusion that it was due to the development of vehicles beyond the simple walking which also can make quite a mess at certain times, rather than offer a more industrially pietistic argument that the result is to make aware the terrifying situations that may come about with development. However the latter theory also suggests another issue which we may not be wearily ready to take upon and that is the possibility that while development was indeed allowed in the thinking of God perhaps even the atrocities are allowed in the mind of God in a more subtle way there is room for all and any actions that may occur due to a certain development. For this let us look on the matter of Kingship in Israel history when the cry was heard God obliged and it brought with it tremendous suffering, destruction and darkness due to human rule



which would also have been allowed in destiny and in theological terms in the mind of God.

“If one believes in God at all, the implications deserve to be followed right through. Quohélet expects us to do this, and not to imagine that we can take liberties with our Maker or manipulate Him in our interests. We are confronted with God at God’s most formidable: as one who is not impressed by our chatter or by our ritual gifts and airy promises. The opening paragraphs of chapter 5 derive home these points with vigour.; ‘God is in heaven you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.... God has no pleasure in fools.’ God meets us in this book in three main aspects: as Creator, as Sovereign, and as Unsearchable Wisdom.”<sup>1</sup>

If we are to consider that God also in God’s self composes the finality and destiny of all life then we should surely accept as God given the entirety of life as it happens as Job was quite willing to explain to his wife

---

<sup>1</sup> Derek Kidner: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance; Leicester ,Inter varsity Press, 1976,15

in the second chapter of that book which bears his name. The problem of 'Being' is quite simple as the writer of Ecclesiastes explains in 'All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing. What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun' (1.8,9). In these words at least for the present study a wholesome summary is set out. Life does not allow humans to get ahead of itself. Let us even considering the most modern discoveries as stem cell research from the point of this summary is something that was on the cards, it was the probable outcome for treating incurable diseases. The scientists who found that out should not boast of it but realize it was a development that was expected and which will be eventually found out. It is the basic difficulty of accepting things which are beyond our understanding. There is no wisdom that claims the 'knowing', however people may construe for themselves books on knowing about knowing. For the writer this wisdom in which he boasts of '.. my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge, and I applied my mind to know

wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that also is but a chasing after wind' (.1.16b,17).

“Across the centuries the Quohemoth speaks to our world with a directness and relevance that is, at first sight, quite startling. We hear notes that we have heard in our day under the term ‘the acids of modernity’. In the post war world we have encountered nihilism and the atheistic existentialism and the inherent quest for values is the same. This search for abiding certainty and meaning is the search of Everyman in every generation..... Today as in his day, there is need of some bridge concepts between two worlds, one dead and the other still struggling to be born!”<sup>2</sup>

To add to this the two worlds also represent the two points of a never ending cycle of births that becomes and has being yet identifies with the world of knowledge made by those who preceded them and leaves nothing for the world that will succeed them as they never can

---

<sup>2</sup> Edgar Jones: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes; London, SCM Press Ltd., 1961,275

become immortal in the aspect of knowledge. When a person who finally leaves the non satisfaction in finding this wisdom beyond us he or she settles on the trying to understand the things which he or she may try to unravel and this is explained in chapter two in Ecclesiastes ‘Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had spent in doing it, and again, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun’ (1.17). We may try to decode this restlessness and the peacelessness of mind as the fall from grace in the beginning of Genesis where the loss of God’s image also lost for us the mind of God which we are unable to grasp as in Isaiah 55.8, ‘.... my thoughts are not your thought, nor are your ways my ways...’ and the peace of God escapes humans.

The writer presents varied other reasons in accordance with his or her theology most specifically in chapters six and seven. In modern times we think of education as being in knowledge, skill and attitudes. For this writer knowledge was a disaster and skill was a disaster as mentioned above and in these two chapters we see the

breakdown of attitudes as well ‘For what advantage have the wise over fools? And what do the poor have who know how to conduct themselves before the living?’ (6.7) and also in ‘... there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evil-doing.(7.15) and even in a superficial glance we see this list of futilities at no close end. Then we need to question ourselves on the importance of ‘Being’ whether it is at all related to God’s plan and will a God as we believe in Christian ideology who embodies love assign an unsure path of living for all humanity throughout all eternity. This of course is a constant question we come across when we talk of evil in the world. However in this case all is evil in that human assumptions are false therefore life on such premises is due to fall by the wayside and life becomes a cruel reality. However it is the only path ordained by God for all God’s creatures as it is the only symbolic system which keeps human beings as human beings with an ever attempting jump to reach God but with a terrible fall that results from it and crushes ego.

“In constantly fresh turns of thought he made his sallies against the claim of wisdom to supremacy, in order to destroy its false prestige, and to confront it with the fact that a One higher than the wise had appointed bounds that it was not to pass. For wisdom too bears marks of all earthly things. In itself it possess no absolute value, nor can it mediate such; when measured by the highest goal, it is vain. Knowledge of this fact, however, grows from being plunged in the creative power of God, whose absolute freedom works itself out in a predestination which is opaque to man (6.10, 9.1), but is nevertheless not an impersonal fate, but a personally determined action which has revealed itself to men as such”.<sup>3</sup>

Hence the ‘Being’ of humanity is the work of God through which humanity understands that it is the work of God. Simple as it seems it also bridges a deeper truth that predestination is also an option with which humanity operates and we are now thrown into a more Calvinistic thought stream which may once again permeate the

---

<sup>3</sup> Walter Eichrodt: *Theology of the Old Testament Volume VII*; London, SCM Press Ltd., 1967,494

disability of a creative thought but as we follow in the next two considerations the essential factor of 'Being' is also accompanied with varied other factors which may lessen our emphasis on a nihilistic predestination.

### 'Being' Bears No Promise

If the first part of this chapter sounded more like the penning of an Erasmus modeling humanist the next would be more of a lover of Oriental philosophy! But when we are confronted with such a theme as we shall prove from relevant literature we are to allow the capacity of varied meanings from the same piece of work. What we groped for in the first consideration was that 'Being' even though painful and meaningless to some extent it is undeniably necessary. It is not merely we conclude that as we have no power over it but on the contrary, only true wisdom we receive that life itself is the medium through which we are to wonder our existence and being in existence is essential for our awareness.

“The presence of inequities and the permanent sealing of injustice at death prompts Qohelet to despise life. Yet because he cannot welcome the destruction of personal identity he refuses to carry his argument to its logical conclusion. By contrast, comparable skeptics in Egypt and Mesopotamia openly endorse suicide.... Unlike these authors from other lands Qohelet opts for life. He even recommends the pursuit of pleasure during youth, when one normally has the energy to enjoy life. Qohelet acknowledges that some people lack the capacity to discover pleasure in various forms – delicious food, desirable women, expensive clothing and perfume. By disposition and disability, they find it impossible to follow Qohelet's advice, and life passes by them.”<sup>4</sup>

Suicide whether it be physical, mental or spiritual is not be philosophized in this regard due to the workings above as we need ‘Being’ more than ‘Being’ needs us. However we are about to start on another aspect of

---

<sup>4</sup> James Crenshaw: Ecclesiastes; London, SCM Press,1988,27



Ecclesiastes where in slight angles we may once again be led to understand the nihilistic features of the book but this attempt is to view such thought in a different light. Just before we enter into that famous poem in chapter three we enter a text where we find the promise of two very important characteristics that will line the following argument which being understanding and joy. ‘For to the one who pleases God, God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God.’ (2.26a). The promise of such virtue which for the writer supersede the vanity that he or she explains through this text is short lived as in the next sentence itself this argument is broken down and to complement it there breaks this extraordinary poetical verse flowing with ever present feeling. This at least in the strict literary sense points to the ontological theory the Ecclesiastes writer has been propounding on so far and for us who in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has many terms to attribute may come up with any such terminology to represent such view whether it be destiny, lessons of life, real existence, changing scenes of life, limited human action,

delusion, authenticity of being, phenomena of continuation etc. 'A time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war; and a time for peace.' (3.8) a historical witness to the uncontrollable inanity of the human expression of feat the foolhardiness of triumph!

If life does in fact takes its course no matter what human achievement accomplishes we once again roll into a sense of absurdity where we are helpless in the sight of attaining any grasp of the need of our 'Being' and very specially for the non theistic thinker this dilemma becomes of such mammoth burden that future reflection upon it becomes a waste of time and indeed a chasing after wind. The writer goes onto express in the third chapter the 'Being' as very theistic as possible that God had assigned work for humans even though they might feel no use of it. 'He has made everything suitable for its time' more over he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from beginning to the end.'(3.11). Is this not the shortcoming of wisdom that we wrestled with in the previous section and which we who stand fallen in the

imperfection of thought are unable to produce any such argument to clear the air of confusion.

“In Ecclesiastes God is not only unknown through to man through revelation; God is unknowable through reason, the only means by which the author believes knowledge is attainable. Such a God is not Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel. God is rather the mysterious, inscrutable Being whose existence must be presupposed as that which determines the life and fate of man, in a world man cannot change, and where all his effort and values are rendered meaningless. Thus in the place of a religion of faith and hope and obedience, this write expresses a mood of disillusionment and proffers a philosophy of resignation.”<sup>5</sup>

Quite contrary to the history of theological thinking and the still ongoing debates of natural and special revelation the Ecclesiastes author brings into the fray probably the darkest secret in revelation studies which has been (mis)

---

<sup>5</sup> R B Y Scott: Proverbs and Ecclesiasts; London Anchor Bible Doubleday, 1965, 191

construed by scholars to aid them on their journey of reasoning, reason stands unjustified and full of loop holes which brings no effective groundwork to begin or to proceed. Would it not be fair then to express that 'Being' is but a reasonably explicit ideology and it bears no promise and no certainty. The moment we try to find meaning we fall either into the two traps of finding the mind of God or finding a way through reason where we find through human terms to identify the mind of God which according to our writer both bears marks of unfeasible endeavours.

"Ecclesiastes therefore means that the things which God has appointed for men signify only toil. This is of course not God's fault, who makes everything aright. But what help is this to man who cannot 'find out' the work of God? There is no coincidence between man's actions and the 'time' appointed by God.; man always misses the mark. It is a strange discovery! The despair of a wise man at a life which he knows to be completely encompassed by God, but which has nevertheless lost all

meaning for him, because God's activity has sunk down into an unattainable concealment".<sup>6</sup>

Unattainable concealment then it is through which we conclude this section of study because whenever we question that we know the purpose of an action or the doctrine of causation we bring ourselves into a situation where we may speculate but the speculating platform is in another dimension of thought. This as a matter of fact stands in stark contrast to many teachings of all great religions even that of Christianity and more of Buddhism. Neither the merit or demerit of an action cannot be speculated upon nor can it be expected. It is beyond human imagination and as the quoted author places it the mark will always be missed. Then we embark on the question that if 'Being' is essential for God but for the beings itself it bears no promise then what on earth if at all not in heaven! can it be the mystery of life? This will in fact be dealt at length in the next section but true to our findings even this question

---

<sup>6</sup> Gerhard Von Rad: Old Testament Theology; Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1962, 456

has no promise yet we may conclude with a few points of practical sense. The writer beings into light, the concept of judgment which has been almost been aloof in the present discussion and which inevitably will transform our thinking in the next section. 'For I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work.'(3.17) . This is also supported in the ninth chapter of the book where the author explains to his already mesmerized or confused audience that the lack of a promise does not end the lack of the need to survive but rather a requisite to 'chase the wind' for it is through this struggle that humanity achieves a promise of enlightened in 'Being'. 'Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, not bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favour to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all.'(9.11) Subsequently the heading as put in the New Revised Standard Version for this section of 'take life as it comes', then again with a final twist we find in the next section that the humility of that proposition is

the real requirement and not the embracing of the doctrine.

### ‘Being’ Promotes Virtue

Is then the ‘world is all a stage and we are all actors’ whose parts bear no meaning and however much the script can be changed the acting naturally follows a course, a course which is also unknown! How terribly inconvenient for us in a time where we require answers where we believe we need to know quick answers and to decide on that knowledge. Shall we query then if at all whether anything can be known? For the Ecclesiastes writer and in this case for some scholars the writer present remarkably dissimilar accounts about the metaphysics of life in general. It is due to this same fact that this book remains a haunting reality where we expect to find the unexpected and the non expected all lying as strands of a very vivid tapestry and only God could have woven and that also into minds of individuals who would have been apt in assimilating such vast programming into a simple two hundred and twenty two versed poem.

“In Ecclesiastes, orthodoxy alternates with a melancholy skepticism about the purposelessness of life. The interpretation of the book is complicated by the difference of scholarly opinion whether the orthodoxy and the skepticism come from the same author or indicate a drastic process of editorial revision. If the work is substantially by one author we may perhaps think of him repeating and reflecting on the traditional teaching (e.g. 3.17) lamenting the seeming purposelessness of life (e.g. 2.11,17) and the dismal prospect of what lies beyond it 3.20.”<sup>7</sup>

However, the key issue that awakens our sense buds is not the number of authors but the culmination of several epistemological peaks. On the one hand if the human’s being is essential but without promise the natural question arises of what exactly is possible for the human spirit and the author at one point explains that if you would come to a sphere of such understanding there

---

<sup>7</sup> G W Anderson: *The History and Religion of Israel*; Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, 182



itself you are promised of having access to some portion of true knowledge.

“Quohelet believed that man’s attempts to order his life by exercising his God given wisdom were frustrated by the limitations which God imposed upon that wisdom: in particular, that he had kept him ignorant of the appropriate times for action. As in the world of nature, where even the birds know the proper time for migration (Jer.87), and the crops duly ripen at the proper time for migration (Job 5.260, So it was generally believed, human success depends on knowledge of ‘proper time’. Such knowledge was believed to be, at least to some extent, accessible to man”<sup>8</sup>

Towards the end of the fourth chapter and the entirety of the fifth chapter are devoted to the elucidation of what we would call moral values friendship, reverence, humbleness and contentment given a prominent stand ‘Two are better than one, because they have a good

---

<sup>8</sup> R N Whybray: Ecclesiastes; Sheffield, JSOT Press, 1989, 67

reward for their toil....'(4.9), 'Guard your steps when you go into the house of God... '(5.1a), 'With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words; but fear God' (5.7), 'This is what I have seen to be good : it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toil under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot.'(5.18). Let us take care that we do not promote Hedonism as we might be slightly justified when we see that pleasure that can be dwelt upon if duty bears no meaning. Then again we see this condition of living well is a simple requisite. If far greater things are beyond our imagination let us re echo the words of the psalms 'O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and marvelous for me.'(131.1). In a more humorous glimmer, enjoy the time you have, rather than spend it on looking at how you fared, we are called to spend the time we have in achieving a perfection through cultivation of qualities which extend even to the early part of the eighth chapter through to the tenth followed by the eleventh.

Now we have come to two conclusions on what can be known, firstly that we can know only so much and secondly the virtues of building up. In another contrast the Ecclesiastes writer sews a hem which Christians may find the whole point of the inclusion of this book in the Biblical canon and that being the awaiting for the fulfillment and in this case we relate Christological experiences into it. 'Because sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the human is fully set to do evil. Though sinners do evil a hundred times and prolong their lives, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they stand in fear before him.'(8.11,12) Do we see slight glimpses of Lutheran crying from the depths and justification of grace through faith in these words? It could very well be that our 'Being' is in expectation for a similar fulfillment even amidst a disillusioned or maya of life.

"Its prevailing note is that of disillusionment. The writer has looked at and studies human life from many points of view, and all he finds in the end is 'vanity'. He knows that men think of God as rewarding goodness and

punishing wickedness, yet he does not see that there is any practical difference between them in the end (8.10, 9.1-3). All paths lead to one end – the grave and there men share the same lot, and have no memory of what their life has been. The writer is aware of the doctrine of human immortality, but cannot accept it; there is no proof of it.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> W O E Oesterley, Theodore H Robinson: Hebrew Religion; London, SPCK, 1937,365

### **Further Study Notes III**

But we with such knowledge of an eschaton could see the Christ concept of liberation however this knowledge becomes an answer if we prolong questions in the same direction, Let us therefore return to it after finding what could be in store for a humanity asked to develop virtue but has no promise of it. Through the book the writer refers to ‘an evil under the sun’ in which case this refers to the ill effects of vice in the world. At the moment of rapid change in this world we in 2014 have truly long for a virtuous society. The utopian thinkers of all ages have understood the need of a virtue or the exact contrast for a dystopia. How then are we to understand the virtuous qualities in a salvific drama? The simple answer would be that it is also unfathomable. The liberation of humankind deals with the ‘Being’ of humanity under various paradigms and the realization of liberation which is also a gift of God as it should be and does not shed much light on the aspect of ‘Being’ since, as we saw from the beginning ‘Being’ has no promise and if at all

guarantees are given they are also hidden in God enigmatic self.

“God’s gifts, however, strike one here as an act of remoteness rather than of generosity. For in fact what God gives is a perplexing, less satisfying. ‘unhappy business’ (1.13) . There are gifts for enjoyment (3.12), but they are given along with that are given along with that which is vanity. Even what is given of wealth, possession, and honour (6.2) is in fact a vanity, ‘a grievous ill’ (6.2) This witness is no atheist, he does not want to deny God or Gods gifts. That much, if taken alone, is unexceptional in Israel’s account of Yahweh..... Ecclesiastes , as a witness to negativity, pushes past these convictions, which are no doubt serious and positively intended affirmation, to assert the inscrutability of Yahweh,”<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Walter Bruggeman: *Theology of the Old Testament*; Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2005, 395