

Solomon's Lessons on Life

Dee Bowman

Solomon was the wisest man of his age. When he was but a young man and had just ascended to the throne of his father, God appeared to him in Gibeon and said "Ask what I shall give thee." Solomon, showing that he was a wise man even then, said "Give me an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad..." (I Kings 3:1-ff). God did according to His word and gave him the mind of minds, a wisdom far above all that were before him.

Solomon ran an experiment with life. He decided to consider "all things that are done under heaven," to see what had value and what did not. His experiment ran the gamut of life. He searched in science, in politics, in agriculture, in philanthropy, in pleasure, looking in every nook and cranny to ascertain "what was that good for men all the days of their life."

With a mind filled with determination, he lived life "with all the gusto you can." He sought wisdom and knowledge and found that "in much wisdom is much grief: and 'he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow' (1:18). He worked on inequities and he saw that "that which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered" (2:15). He concluded that "it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting" (7:2), that there is no good to be had in reminiscing about the "good ole days" (7:10), that prosperity and adversity both have a place in life (7:14), that life is filled with all sorts of inequities (9:11), that a reputation which was a lifetime in the building can be destroyed in a few minutes by just one misplaced word (10:1), that there is no such thing as a secret (10:20), that diligence (9:10), humility (9:12) and prudence (9:16) are a necessary part of good life here. But in none of it did he find any real satisfaction.

Life became for him a frustrating experience. He said, "I hated all my labor which I had taken" and he concluded after having slaked his thirst for living by drinking of the very dregs of life, "I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do: and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun" (2:11).

Interestingly, as he performed this function, his wisdom remained with him. He was able, for instance, to stand off and view himself when he had "given myself to wine," or when he had "increased more than all that were before" him, while apparently retaining a sense of balance that allowed him to objectively appraise what he saw and felt (Cf. 2:3,9).

He does note several things which contribute to happiness and tranquility as life is lived "under the sun." Good food and good friends, along with nice garments are concluded as being desirable for quality living (9:10). Living joyfully with "the wife of thy youth" is

recommended. And the ability to accept with resignation the allotments of Divine Providence contributes to a happy life, he says (9:11).

But mostly his experiment is finished in sheer frustration, for he says, "Then the dust shall return to the earth as it was: and the spirit to God who gave it" (11:9). And in one last gasp of desperation he concludes, "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity," indicating that there is actually no lasting benefit to life under the sun.

And so, "let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter," he says, "Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13). A man's focus must be other-worldly, his attitude that of a sojourner or he will never be truly happy.