

Depression and Despair In Life

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Ecc. 2:20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labor which I took under the sun.

Depression, despondency, and despair; all feelings of a similar shade, are real and present in a world filled with uncertainty, trial, and calamity. These feelings, taking over the lives of people today, have been classified as a disease. They might well be. One of the biggest industries in medicine is the industry of creating mood altering drugs to help people cope with situations they feel they have no control over; and situations in which they feel that their energies do not make a difference and are worth nothing. In this busy, busy world today, people are finding it harder and harder to find self-validation. They are finding it harder and harder to find a reason for keeping on. So, depression and despair are on the rise.

We have text verses here in which Solomon expressed despair about the great and small things of his life. In this writing, he reduces everything he has labored to do down to what seems mundane and apparently meaningless. These verses draw us a map for a trip into depression. But they also have a route laid out for traveling out the other side back into sensible thinking and reasoning. We want to examine this trip that Solomon takes, and we trust that the Holy Spirit will help us see in scripture some things that leads to depression and despair, and see what can bring us out of it and enable us to seize on a proper attitude to help us in these life experiences.

I. Depression and Despair In Life

- ❖ In our text (Ecc. 2:20) let us realize that Solomon is not writing that because of all he said in at least the previous 19 verses of this chapter that he is therefore going to give himself over to despair. What he is actually saying is that as a result of his way of thinking about all that he discovered and wrote about in the first 19 verses (and also in Chapter 1), he has brought himself to a state of despair.
- ❖ Now, let's approach his testimony about despair by looking at what he stated in the previous verses, and how they relate to where he had gotten himself emotionally.
- ❖ Note that he is looking for a reason or purpose in the activities of life. He

looks at a number of distractions or pastimes in search of an answer:

- v.1 - Mirth and pleasure
- v.2 - wise use of wine
- v. 3 - construction projects
- vv. 4-6 - crop farming
- v. 7 - workforce planning and implementing, and livestock industry
- v. 8 - art collecting and art appreciation; hoarding
- ❖ Through v. 10, Solomon was on the right track of making the proper use of these great privileges and opportunities:
 - **Ecc. 2:9-10** So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also **my wisdom remained with me. 10** And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I **withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labor:** and this was my portion of all my labor.
 - This is a mental condition of optimism, even though you and I know that within all these things Solomon had a lot of challenges
 - Fun times (mirth and pleasure) are not all a bed of roses as most of us can witness (what about the times when the joke is on us, or when laughing turns to tears when something really bad suddenly pops up)
 - wise use of stimulants (or as in the case of wine; wise use of depressants) - what about when these times were suddenly shattered when we learned that one of our loved ones had become an addict
 - building things - things get out of square; buildings collapse while construction going on; can't get the right material
 - crop farming - the rain ruins planting; the rain stops just when crops need it; a blight hits; pests like worms or beavers eat up half the crop
 - workforce planning, getting workers to work, running an industry (like livestock production - constant problems to be confronted and solved
 - gathering pleasant things together as your property - thieves break in, or water damages, or stuff breaks
 - So, we know many of these challenges happened to Solomon, but in it all he maintained an optimism.
 - Which brings us to the change and the reason for the change:
- ❖ **In v. 11, he starts thinking** (differently) about what all this means. In that thinking he goes off the sound pathway and starts to devise reasons why all this is no good. The reasons he comes up with are the **thought processes that cause depression.** They are:
 - First, because all that effort was a big headache - v.11 (vanity and vexation

of the spirit)

- If we see our efforts on earth as nothing more than a big headache with no purpose beyond them, we need to change jobs, change vocations, or...maybe change attitude
- Second, in his mind, there was no profit (to his labors) under the sun - v.11
 - It's possible that everything he itemized in ch. 2 did not, in fact have any profit as regarding earthly things.
- Third, he concluded (vv. 12-16) that the foolish and the wise came to the same end as regarding their effort and the end of their lives:
 - v. 15 - He felt that "Events" in their lives are "in common"
 - v.15 - He felt that imagining having wisdom to be better state than being foolish is wrong
 - v.16 - The wise die in the same manner as fools, and are forgotten as quickly as fools
 - When we allow ourselves to imagine that the so-called fate of the wise and the foolish amount to the same thing in life, we are treading on the path of depression and despair
 - v.18-19 He fretted because it was possible...even likely...that all the labor he had done would be managed by what MIGHT be a fool.
- ❖ Let's be reminded again that all these statements and thoughts preceded Solomon's statement that he had brought himself to despair.
- ❖ What was the nature of all this experimenting and drawing of conclusions?
 - Ans. They had earthly objectives in view, the end results he was evaluating were all based on earthly things (vs. Making an assessment about eternal impacts)

II. Exiling Depression and Despair and Exiting the Condition

- ❖ Solomon writes of the remedy for this condition he has gotten in to and he tells us how in vv. 22-26
 - vv. 22-23 Recognize that our earthly labors have a measure of vanity and trouble attached to them; and that the rule of thumb is the more we vex ourselves over and through our earthly labors, the more vanity they contain and the more trouble they cause our souls
 - vv. 23-24 Recognize that earthly activities, accomplishments, possessions and the challenges that accompany getting and having them are given to us by the Lord for us to enjoy and grow by...not to make us miserable and over-wrought.
 - Look for the good for our souls in the things that we go through, in the

things we get to do and the things we are allowed to have.

- Recognize that all activities of life actually have vexation in them, but our **attitude makes the difference** between peace, comfort, and even blessings or hassles, stress, depression and even despair
- v. 26 Recognize that there is a difference between a) getting, possessing, hoarding, lusting for gain, and b) receiving (from God) having (at the hand of God) and enjoying (because the Lord has given to us for that reason)
- Acknowledge the providential hand of the Lord both in what we enjoy of life's benefits and in what we suffer from life's hard knocks.
- Recognize that:
 - **Ecc 3:1** To every *thing there is* a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
 - **Ecc 3:2** A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up *that which is* planted;
 - **Ecc 3:3** A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up;
 - **Ecc 3:4** A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
 - **Ecc 3:5** A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
 - **Ecc 3:6** A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
 - **Ecc 3:7** A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
 - **Ecc 3:8** A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.