

# The Ultimate Thief

*Ecclesiastes 2:12-26*

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## CUSTOM

- Missions week dinner
- Congregational meeting
- North campus interest meeting

Baby dedication

Samuel Armando Trevino

Armando and Kylee

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## BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Ecc 2:12 NKJV)**Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; For what can the man do who succeeds the king?--Only what he has already done.

**(Ecc 2:13 NKJV)**Then I saw that wisdom excels folly As light excels darkness.

**(Ecc 2:14 NKJV)**The wise man's eyes are in his head, But the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived That the same event happens to them all.

**(Ecc 2:15 NKJV)**So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, It also happens to me, And why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also is vanity."

**(Ecc 2:16 NKJV)**For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die?

**As the fool!**

**(Ecc 2:17 NKJV)**Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

**(Ecc 2:18 NKJV)**Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

**(Ecc 2:19 NKJV)**And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.

**(Ecc 2:20 NKJV)**Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun.

**(Ecc 2:21 NKJV)**For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

**(Ecc 2:22 NKJV)**For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun?

**(Ecc 2:23 NKJV)**For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.

**(Ecc 2:24 NKJV)**Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.

**(Ecc 2:25 NKJV)**For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?

**(Ecc 2:26 NKJV)**For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

**INTRO**

Up to this point, the preacher, Solomon, has delivered a sermon that presents a bleak outlook on the purpose of life "under the sun." There's a certain "vanity" and pointlessness to life that equates to trying to find substance in the wind.

This viewpoint was not original to Solomon. As we look back, Adam and Eve recognized that something was terribly different and wrong with life once it exited Eden.

- Adam and Eve named their first son Cain, which means possession. After she got a man from the Lord, her second son was named Abel, which means "vanity or vapor." (A word to married women). Certainly, to see their righteous son murdered by their wicked son probably seemed like vanity and grasping for the wind.
- Noah's parents named Him Noah, which means "rest or comfort." But WHY did they name him that? Because they were so tired! Genesis 5 tells us, "(Gen 5:29 KJV )And

he called his name Noah, saying, "This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed."

- In Genesis 47, Jacob, at the end of a long and confusing life, made the statement to Pharaoh, "Few and evil are the days of my life."
- Moses' take on the human lifetime is found in Psalm 90: **(Psa 90:10 NKJV) The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.**
- David looks at the life of a person and proclaims: **(Psa 39:5 NKJV) Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my age is as nothing before You; Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah (Psa 39:6 NKJV) Surely every man walks about like a shadow; Surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up riches, And does not know who will gather them. (Psa 39:7 NKJV) "And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.**

## APPLICATION

Those final words of David bring up the ultimate question, "Without the hope of God, is there any true purpose, significance, or lasting value to one's life?"

Solomon is on a search:

- He has looked at the teachers of nature, history, and knowledge to see if he could learn something new about life, only to realize that life is flowing in a cyclical pattern. Things keep moving, but there doesn't seem to be much meaning.
- He has put his heart and body to the test with pleasure (more laughter, entertainment, and livin it up), possessions (more stuff), and prosperity (no lack of any physical desire).
- So far, through all of his pursuits, his conclusions have still been that it is all vanity and grasping for the wind.

The end of chapter 2 is the first time we see Solomon start to make some minor concessions. He does not change his conclusion that life under the sun is full of injustice, meaninglessness, frustration, and vanity, but he states a couple of conclusions with a lightly positive spin. In other words, ***"Life will never make sense, but if you have to live it, a couple of things might make it slightly better."***

***But right after he tells us those couple things, he gets right back to the point, "Right when you think you may have accomplished something, can enjoy something in life, it gets robbed by the ultimate thief... death!"***

## APPLICATION

### Intro: Death

Death is one of those topics that is interesting... No one enjoys talking about it. It is the proverbial “Elephant in the room.” Everyone knows it is inevitably coming, but no one wants to consider what death might mean for life and eternity.

Concerning death, there are probably three groups here this morning:

- **Death is fearful:** It holds a level of uncertainty. You know there is nothing you can do to escape it, but life seems a lot easier if you don’t have to think about it and pretend that it doesn’t exist.
- **Death is fresh:** Maybe you have just experienced the death of a loved one, or you are going through the reality of death knocking on your doorstep, and you can’t avoid it. It’s fresh in your mind, and you are forced to deal with all the questions that come with its reality.
- **Death is favorable:** Not in the sense that you are hoping to die, but you know that there is a great hope beyond death because you are confident of your eternal destination. You have trusted Jesus, believe His promises, and look forward to eternity with Him.

The fact is, death is reality, and God would have us consider this reality in order to bring us peace concerning the disconcerting subject. We must agree with the ancient Greek playwright Euripides when he said:

***“No one can confidently say that he will still be living tomorrow.”***

This morning, we will cover 3 main points concerning the injustices of death under the sun and then finish with our above-the-sun applications.

## ILLUSTRATION

Solomon mentions the certainty of death in eight different sections throughout the entire book.

# 1 Death does not respect position

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**Ecc 2:11 NKJV - Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.**

**Ecc 2:12 NKJV - Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly; For what can the man do who succeeds the king?--Only what he has already done.**

## APPLICATION

As Solomon is striving to be the most accomplished King Israel had ever seen, a thought occurs to him... “Can I really do anything that kings before me haven’t done, and the kings that come after really do anything new?” The world, throughout history, has gone through radical regimes of power.

- The Pharaohs of Old
- Nebuchadnezzar
- Alexander the Great
- Caesar Augustus
- Genghis Kahn
- Charlemagne
- Napoleon
- So many more all throughout the world!

***There’s only one thing that they all managed to do successfully... die!***

## APPLICATION

In Psalm 82, God is judging the human rulers of the earth. He looks at these "mighty ones" and their pride and haughtiness because of their power and authority. Despite their pomp and circumstance, they are walking blindly in injustice. God tells them:

**(Psa 82:6-7 NKJV) I said, "You are gods (mighty ones, judges - God says "I gave you a place of great authority), and all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes."**

In other words, just in case you forgot, you're just human, and you think that your self-importance will cause even death itself to pass over you. Think again!

Before King Louis 14th of France died, he uttered these words to those around him:

## QUOTE

**“Why are you weeping? Did you imagine that I was immortal?”**

King Louis 14th of France

11:35



There are many today who falsely think that they are gods because of their wealth, power, and accomplishments. But death doesn't respect people. The fact is, to the prince and to the popper, to the ruler and the ruled, to the powerful and the powerless, the end of them all is the same... death manages to find its way. Not only that, but the one who comes next has a futile existence because there really isn't anything new to accomplish that hasn't already been accomplished or attempted; no matter how far someone climbs the ladder of power, the human heart still longs for another rung to get one step higher, only to realize that death will never allow them to reach the top... if there even is a top.

It's recorded that when Alexander the Great heard about the possible existence of other worlds, he wept because he would only be able to conquer one of them.

## 2 Death does not respect perspective

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**Ecc 2:13 NKJV - Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.**

**Ecc 2:14 NKJV - The wise man's eyes are in his head, But the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived That the same event happens to them all.**

### APPLICATION

Solomon observes an obvious truth: that life goes somewhat better when you use your brain to think about what you are doing while living (wisdom excels folly). He tried wisdom, he tried folly, and his conclusion is that wisdom is like walking in light while folly is like stumbling around in the dark.

- He describes wisdom as having “Eyes in your head”
- I love the straightforward commentary of Matthew Poole:

### QUOTE

**“Are in his head; in their proper place, and therefore they can see, which they could not do if they were out of his head.**

Matthew Poole, M. (1853), Annotations upon the Holy Bible (Vol. 2, p. 283). Robert Carter and Brothers.

## APPLICATION

You've heard the term "Your mind's eye." Your mind perceives what is going on in life around you. You're actively considering the repercussions of your decisions; you're weighing out possible outcomes. Your life and choices are carefully thought through and planned out.

- He describes foolishness as "Walking in darkness." This is the YOLO mentality: "You only live once!" It reflects the epicurean mindset of "eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die! Live for the moment. Act before you think. Ready fire aim.

Solomon, even in his pessimistic worldview, acknowledges common sense. Your life will be more illuminated if you choose wisdom rather than folly.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**14 The same event happens to them both. Ecc 2:15 NKJV - So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, It also happens to me, And why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also is vanity."**

**Ecco 2:16 NKJV - For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As the fool!**

## QUOTE

**“Despite the benefits that can be gained by wisdom, or the difficulty gained by folly, some things are outside of the control of both, namely death. Death is the one established reality you can't control.**

Pastor Josh



## APPLICATION

The irony that Solomon finds is that though one can improve their short, meaningless life by using wisdom, in the end, they meet the same fate as the one who lived as a fool. They both die, get buried together in the same graveyard, people eventually forget about them. One day, you walk around in an old graveyard and look at two gravestones; you don't know who the fool was and who was the wise guy.

- Now, I'm not implying that it doesn't matter whether you pursue knowledge and wisdom or not. I believe it matters significantly.
- But Solomon comes to a legitimate conclusion about life "under the sun." If there is no eternity, and this world is all you have, why does it matter if you have a master's degree along with a perfectly planned life if you get buried next to the guy whose life was one big party and who never took personal responsibility for anything? Especially when some future generation may not even recognize there was any difference between the two of you, or even care.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**Ecc 2:17 NKJV - Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

## APPLICATION

Solomon didn't "hate life" in a suicidal type of way. He was emotionally frustrated and mentally distressed that no matter what one did or how they lived, they ended up the same.

The 18th-century French atheistic philosopher Voltaire once wrote, ***"I hate life, but I'm afraid to die."***

We don't get the sense that Solomon was afraid to die. It was almost as if he was saying, "I hate life, and death just makes it worse."

**If only there was a way the sting of death could be removed, death itself defeated, life eternal something to look forward to!**

### 3 Death does not respect pedigree

#### BIBLE PASSAGE

**Ecc 2:18 NKJV - Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.**

**Ecc 2:19 NKJV - And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity.**

#### APPLICATION

Solomon was so frustrated that his life's work might be left to a fool who would enjoy and waste all that he had labored and toiled for! I mean, things didn't happen overnight.

Solomon spent 13 years building his own house... only to die and give it to a fool.

- And ironically, this was the case! All his wives and all his wisdom couldn't render him a wise son to rule in his place. Rehoboam oversaw the demise of Solomon's kingdom.
- This thought was enough for Solomon to say, "I hate life and I hate work!"

#### BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Ecc 2:20 NKJV)Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun.**

**(Ecc 2:21 NKJV) For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.**

## APPLICATION

A poignant realization emerges that death levels the playing field of life—both the wise and the foolish end the same, leaving their achievements behind to those who may not value or remember them.

- And it doesn't matter how much you persevere or how hard you work to accomplish something in life because someone will ruin it all in the future.
- **A study done by the Williamson group found that 70% of inheritances left by wealthy families in the US were completely squandered away by the succeeding generation.**

I wonder today how many boomers look at Gen Z, TikTok, and general entitlement that has saturated our culture and think, "Everything I did to try and build a good life and contribute to a healthy society, I'm going to leave in their hands?" But nothing's new. People have buildings, and other people come after them and destroy what they built, build something else, only to have the next generation destroy what they've built!

## 4 Death does not respect perseverance

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Ecc 2:22 NKJV) For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun?**

What will all my riches matter to me 5 minutes after I'm dead?

***“Life is hard. Then you die. Then they throw dirt in your face. Then the worms eat you. Be grateful it happens in that order.” David Gerrold (sci-fi writer)***

**(Ecc 2:23 NKJV) For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.**

You work hard, you're full of burdens, and instead of enjoying your life, you can't even sleep at night because of all the anxieties associated with trying to make your life better!

### APPLICATION

Throughout Solomon's sermon on the meaninglessness of life under the sun, he draws a total of 6 conclusions, or points of application, between sections. Verses 24-26 contain the first conclusion about what one could do to get the most out of life.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

**(Ecc 2:24 NKJV) Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.**

**(Ecc 2:25 NKJV) For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?**

**(Ecc 2:26 NKJV) For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

### APPLICATION

Solomon's conclusion is twofold:

1. The best someone can hope for in life under the sun is that they get to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

2. People who seek to live in a godly way have a better chance of enjoying the things they get in life than those who live ungodly. Even though they might have stuff, they can't really fully enjoy it.

#### QUOTE

“*It is not enough to possess “things”; we must also possess the kind of character that enables us to use “things” wisely and enjoy them properly.*”

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996)., Be Satisfied (p. 41). Victor Books.

#### QUOTE

“*Solomon concludes that it is vanity for one who is godless to seek pleasure in material things because God will never truly allow that person to enjoy the things they've gathered. Likewise, the righteous will enjoy what god gives them because the root of their enjoyment is being content with what God gives them.*”

#### APPLICATION

I think the three words that stick out to me the most in Solomon's conclusion are "Nothing is better..." or "This is as good as you can expect."

- Nothing is better than you being able to go on that vacation you saved for.
- Nothing is better than you being able to purchase that new car you've worked for.
- Nothing is better than making the final mortgage payment on your house.
- Yet, when people get all those things, they are left wanting more... but nothing is better.

Or is there something better?

# 1 Above the Sun: Death Respects God's Purpose

## APPLICATION

**Psalm 90:12 NKJV - So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**

Jesus lived a human life, true or false? Jesus' life was subject to the same futility as the rest of ours, true or false? Jesus was faced the same trials, challenges, human frailties, and temptations as us, true or false?

**(Jhn 6:38 NKJV)"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.**

The VALUE that Jesus saw in life was to accomplish the eternal plan of the Father,

Understanding that my life is like a vapor and that I have a limited time to live on this earth gives me the wisdom to take life as an opportunity to do something eternally valuable.

- On the other side of that, when I understand that death is not a dead end but a doorway, and in Christ that doorway leads to everlasting life, it takes the element of fear away.
- When I'm not afraid to die, it is then that I am truly not afraid to live.

***"Death is no more than passing from one room into another. But there's a difference for me, you know. Because in that other room, I shall be able to see." -Helen Keller***

**(2Ti 4:6 NKJV)For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.**

**(2Ti 4:7 NKJV)I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.**

**(2Ti 4:8 NKJV)Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who**

**have loved His appearing.**

It's been said that the best way to live is to live like you're dying. I would argue that's not the best way to live. For the Christian, **"Don't live like you're dying, live like you're going to heaven!"**

## 2 Above the Sun: Death Respects Jesus' Power

### APPLICATION

Does death scare you this morning? Do you feel a sense of hopelessness that death is to great a foe? Do you feel like the deadly sting of the grave cannot be overcome? I have good news! Jesus is all about life, both now and after:

**Jhn 11:25 NKJV - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.**

**And at the end of His gospel, John writes to all those who would read it for ages to come...**

**John 20:31 NKJV - but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.**

**Jesus wants you to have life in Him... But I'm afraid to die! Listen to this:**

**Mat 10:28 NKJV - "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."**

- Don't walk around being afraid of what can kill you, be afraid of what happens to you after you die and you meet God. Be afraid, then come to Jesus and watch as he

makes that fear completely disappear. How freeing it is not to fear death, and to be able to look forward in hope to that which comes after.

**Hebrews 2:14-15 - Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**

If you don't know Jesus today, you don't know life. Come to him by faith and experience his resurrection power! Experience the goodness of the plans he has for you.