Ballads of *Ecclesiastes* (《传道书》歌谣)

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“Ballads of *Ecclesiastes*”, a group of 25 couplets and tercets written from *Ecclesiastes* in the Bible

1. Everything Is Meaningless

The words of the Preacher, song of David, King in Jerusalem:

Meanless, everything is meaningless,
What does a man gain from his work on th’ earth?
A man toils und’r th’ sun, but gains nothingness.

Generations come, generation goeth,
But th’ earth abides forever, one knows,
Th’ sun rises, sets, to where it rose hasteth.

To the south, then to the north the wind goes,
It whirls ’bout continually, and you see,
Returns again to the place where it blows.

It ne’er gets full, all streams flow to the sea,
The streams return to th’ place where they flowing,
They go back to where they came from, know we.

Our eyes never have enough of seeing,
Things are wear’some too great for etymon,
Our ears never hear enough of anything.

Oh, what has been done is what will be done,
And what has been is what will be anew,
So there is nothing new under the sun.

Nothing ’bout which one can say “Something new”,
What has happened had already happened,
And it was here already long ago.

What has happened in th’ past is not recalled,
And what happens now won’t be remembered.

2. Wisdom Is Meaningless (Sonnet)

Th’ preacher, king o’er Israel i’ Jerusalem, Devoted himself to explore and learn All that is done und’r heaven by wisdom.

What a heavy burd’n God has laid on men, All the things that are done he’s examined, Like chasing th’ wind, all o’ them under heaven.

Lo, what is twisted cannot be straightened; Everything done i’ this world is nothingness, And what is lacking cannot be counted.

As great man, he’d found knowledge is useless. He found out what he did was vanity, He tried to learn wisdom, folly, madness.

For with much wisdom comes much misery, Those who increase knowledge increase worry.

3. Pleasures are Meaningless

Enjoy myself and make a test o’ happ’ness, But laughter is mad, and it’s o’ gaiety. Cheer my body wi’ wine, guiding wi’ cleverness, See what good for men, lay hold on folly.

Great works I made, hous’ built, vineyards planted, And self-indulgence is perplexity.

Fruit trees plant’d i’ gardens and orchards I made, Pools I made to water th’ forest o’ grow’ng trees, Also more herds and flocks than any’ne I owned.

Servants and maidens I got, and had slaves Born i’ my house; I amassed gold and silver, And th’ treasure of kings and o’ the provinces.

I got me both male and female singer, And delights o’ the flesh, as well a harem,
By far than anyone I became greater.

Oh, in all this stayed with me my wisdom,
Withheld not my heart from enjoy anything,
What my eyes desired I kept not from them.

My heart delighted i’ all from my working,
And b’hold, all was van’ty, and gained nothing.

4. Wisdom and Folly are Meaningless

Consider wisdom, madness and folly,
What can be done by the king’s successor?
Only that which has been done already.

Wisdom bett’r than folly, th’n darkn’ss, light better.
The eyes o’ a wise man see clearly anything,
A foolish person lives i’ a place darker,

But for us all, the same fate is waiting,
What happ’ns to fools go’ng to happen to me,
What I’ve gained from be’ng so wise is nothing.

The wise man, like the fool, will forgott’n be,
Like th’ fool, the wise man too must pass away.

5. Toil Is Meaningless

The work done under th’ sun was deplorable,
For all is van’ty and I hat’d labor,
Because everything i’ it brought me trouble.

I must leave th’ gains to th’ one that comes after,
Who knows whether wise or foolish he’ll be?
Yet o’ everything I toiled he’ll be master,

Everything my wisdom has earned for me.
I regret I work’d so hard, but in vain,
And have to leave all to someone toilfree.

What do mortals get from all th’ toil and strain?
Even night their minds can’t rest, fast beating,
For all their days are full of grief and pain.
Bett’r than eat and drink men can do nothing,  
Enjoy what he’s earned, this too comes from th’ Lord,  
Without him, who can eat and find d’lighting.

Knowledge and joy giv’n to who pleases God.  
Sinners’ wealth comes to naught before the Lord.

6. Everything Has Its Time
Oh, to everything there is a season,  
God sets th’ time for everything und’r th’ heaven:

He sets th’ time for birth and the time for death,  
The time to plant and the time to uprooth,
The time for killing and th’ time for healing,  
The time for tear’ng down and th’ time for building,
The time for cry and time for elation,  
The time for sorrow and time cotillion,
The time for making love and the time not,  
The time for kissing and the time for naught,
The time to search and the time to mislay,  
The time to keep and th’ time to throw away,
The time to tear and the time to tinker,  
The time to keep silence and time utter,
The time to love and the time to abhor,  
The time for concord and the time for war.

7. The God-Given Task (Sonnet)
What do the mortals get for their hard toil?  
I’ve seen th’ heavy load God has put on ’dults,  
He’s made everyth’ng beautiful in it’s while.

Also he’s set eternity i’ men’s hearts,  
However, they can’t completely fathom  
What he’s done from th’ beginning to th’ limits.
I know that there’s nothing better for them
Than happy and do good while they exist.
In toil, one should eat, drink and have pastime,
It’s God’s gift, and what’ver God does will last,
Nothing can be add’d, noth’ng can be tak’n ’way,
God does it so men will fear his sway vast.

Which is b’fore has, to be, is already,
God makes th’ same thing happen repeatedly.

8. Injustice In The World (Sonnet)
In th’ place of judgment, there was the vicious,
In th’ place o’ righteousn’ss, there was iniquity,
God will judge both the wicked and th’ righteous.

He’s appoint’d every matt’r and activ’ty.
God might manif’st than beast man is no b’tter,
Both man and beast are wait’d by th’ same dest’ny.

And as the one dies, so dies the other,
In fact, both man and beast have the same breath,
Meanwhile, life has no meaning for either.

Both are from earth and both return to earth,
Who knows if th’ human spirit goes upward,
And th’ spirit of animals goes beneath?

Enjoy his work is what for man by God,
No one can see what will be afterward.

9. Oppression and Toil (Sonnet)
Look all th’ oppressions done the sun under,
The tears of such as were oppressed, behold,
No comforter; th’ oppressors had power.

The dead are happier than the living, I told,
But bett’r than both is he who hasn’t got birth,
Who hasn’t seen th’ injustice goes on i’ the world.

All toil and skill spring from th’ envy one hath,
It’s useless and a chasing after squall.  
The fool folds his hands and starve him’slf to death.  

Bett’r is a handf’l wi’ quiet than two handfuls wi’ toil.  
A man had neither son nor broth’r, lonel’ness,  
No end to his toil, not cont’nt wi’ he had all.

Under the sun again someth’ng meaningless,  
It’s too meaningl’ss, miserable business.

10. The Value of a friend

Two men are better than one man lonely,  
They will have a good reward for their toil.  
If one falls, his friend helps him upquickly.  
But pity, no help if one falls to soil.

Again, if it’s cold, two can sleep t’gether,  
And stay warm, no one can keep warm alone.  
Two can resist an ’ttack that would one c’nquer.  
A rope of three cords isn’t eas’ly broken.

11. Advancement Is Meaningless

Better a poor but wise youth than an old  
But foolish king, who no longer takes advice.  
Though i’ the kingdom born from a poor household,  
Instead, th’ youth comes to reign and lives i’ palace.

All th’ living, moving about th’ sun under,  
Follow that youth who replaced the old king;  
Yet not rejoice i’ him will be those come l’ter.  
’Lso vanity and aft’r wind a chasing.

12. Stand in Awe of God (Sonnet)

Guard your steps when you go to th’ house of God;  
To hear r’ther than to proff’r fools’ offering,  
For they don’t know what they do offend th’ Lord.

N’ver be rash wi’ your mouth to utter anything  
B’fore God, for God is i’ heav’n, and you on earth;  
Be few your words, not many as fools speaking.
Fulf’ll your vow, for no pleasure i’ fools he hath,
It’s better that you not make a promise
Than you should vow but not fulfill your oath.

Don’t let your mouth lead you ’nto wickedness,
Neither say that b’fore th’ ang’l your vow an ’rror.
Why let God angry and make you fruitless.

Much dreaming and many words are useless, for,
Therefore stand i’ awe of God wi’ metic’lous care.

13. Riches are Meaningless
If i’ a district you see the poor oppressed,
Justice and rights denied, there’s no marvel,
By a higher one, one official is watched,
And o’er them both are others higher still.
Lo, the king himself profits from the crofts;
The increase from th’ land is taken by all.

Lovers o’ wealth is ne’er satisfied wi’ he gets;
Lovers of money ne’er has money plenty.
It’s also chasing aft’r th’ wind and conceits.

As goods increase, so do those who are h’ngry.
And to th’ owner what are they benefit?
On them except to feast his eyes greedy.

Sweet’s th’ sleep o’ work’rs wh’ther little or much they eat,
But th’’bundance o’ rich man p’mits him no slumber.
Wealth stored up brings hum to the owner o’ it,

Or his wealth were lost through some disaster,
Then left for th’ owner’s son, there won’t be ‘nything.
Naked a man comes from th’ womb of his mother,

And as he comes, so he departs wi’ nothing,
A man d’parts as comes, what he gets lastly?
His whole life is full o’ trouble and suff’ring.

To eat and drink for one is good, comely,
And enjoy th’ good o’ all his work that he taketh
All th’ days of his life God gives him wholly,
For it’s lot. E’ry man was giv’n riche’s and wealth,
And enables him to enjoy, acc’pt th’ doom,
To rejoice i’ his labor; it’s th’ gift God giveth.

Remember th’ days of his life, he seldom,
For God answers him i’ the joy o’ his bosom.

14. The Futility of Life
An evil I have seen under th’ heaven,
And it lies heavy ’pon humanity:
God gives wealth, possessions, and hon’r to men.

They lack noth’ng they d’sire , yet no felic’ty.  
They can’t enjoy these things, ’nstead a stronger.
Grievous evil it is and vanity.

Many years lives, and hundr’d childr’n has a father,
But doesn’t enjoy life, not suitably buried,
Off than he, a stillborn child is better.

Comes’nto van’ty, goes in darkn’ss, name shrouded.
Ne’er sees th’ sun, and knows anything, yet finds rest,
To th’ same place wi’whom long-lived, but ill-fated.

All human toil is for the appetite,
What 'dvantage has a wise man o’er a fool?
What good do th’ poor have, knowing life conduct?

Bett’r is what th’ eyes see than th’ desires of th’ soul.
Whate’er exists has been named already,
No man can contend wi’ one who is pow’rful.

The more the words and the more vanity,
What then is the advantage to a man
During th’ few years o’ his life futility?

Who knows what is good for men under th’ sun?
Who can tell what will happen aft’r he’s gone?
15. The Contrast of Wisdom and Folly

A good name is better than pr’cious ointment,  
And th’ day o’ death better than th’ day o’ beginning.
It’s bett’r to go to the house o’ bereavement

Than to go to a house that is feasting,
For death is th’ destiny o’ individual;
And lay it to heart should be the living.

And lo, sorrow is better than giggle,
A face is sad, a heart may be happy.
The mind o’ the wise is in the house mournful,

While th’ mind of fools is in the house merry.
It’s better to hear the rebuke of th’ wise
Than for one to listen to th’ fools’ ditty.

Under a pot as the crackling of thorns,
So it’s also meaningless, th’ fools laughter.
A wise man ‘to a fool, extortion turns,

And a bribe corrupts a man’s character.
Better is th’ end o’ thing than its birth;
And than pride, patience o’ spirit is better.

In th’ bosom of fools, for anger resteth,
Be i’ your spirit to b’come angry, not quick.
“Why were th’ old days better than these?” not asketh

For it is not wise such questions to ask.
Wisdom, good thing to profit those see th’ sun,
For th’ prot’ction o’ wisdom is that o’ money like.

It’s the advantage of information;
That wisdom preserves one’s life who it hold.
And do please consider what God has done:

Who can straighten what God has made twisted?
In th’ day of prosperity be joyous;
When times are bad, it should be considered:
Oh, God sends both trouble and happiness;  
And you never know what is going to chase.

16. The Riddles of Life

A righteous man perishes i’ his righteousness,  
A wick’d man length’ns his life i’ his e’ildoing.  
Don’t have o’errighteousn’ss, neith’r overwiseness.

Why should you die before your time coming?  
Don’t be overwicked, neither a fool,  
To grasp the one and not let th’ oth’r going.

Th’ man who fears God will avoid extremes all.  
Than ten rulers that are in a city  
Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful.

There’s not a righteous man on earth, surely  
Who does what is right and ne’er makes error.  
Don’t pay ’ttention to e’ery word people say,

Or your servant cursing you, you may hear  
For you also have realized in your mind  
That you likewise have many times cursed other.

All this I’ve test’d by wisdom and I said,  
“I will be wise,” but it was far from me.  
That which has been is far off, ’nd most profound

Who can disco’er it, whate’r wisd’m may be?  
I turned my mind to know and to search out  
And to seek wisdom and the things’ issue,

Wick’dness is folly, folly madn’ss, find that.  
More bitt’r than death th’ woman who is a snare,  
Whose hands are chains and a trap is her heart.

The man who pleases God will escape her,  
But by her the sinner will be captured.  
Behold, this is what I found, says th’ preacher,

Adding one thing to ’nother th’ sum to find,
Among a thousand onl’ one upright man,
But a woman ’mong all these hasn’t been found.

God made mankind upright; I found this ’lone,
But men have gone in search of many design.

17. Obey the King (Sonnet)

“Who is like the wise man?
Who knows the explanation of things?
Wisdom brightens a man’s face and changes its hard appearance.” (Ecclesiastes 8:1)

Keep th’ king’s command because o’ your sacred oath.
Be not hasty to go from his presence.
And do not join in an unrighteous pith,
For he will do whatever he rejoice.
Who can say to th’ king, “What are you doing?”
The word o’ him is authoritative since,
Whoe’er keeps command will know no e’il thing,
And th’ wise heart will know th’ prop’r time and th’ just way.
For there’s a time and way for everything,
Although man’s trouble lie on him heavy.
Indeed, they do not know what will happen,
And there’s no one tell them how it will be.
No man has power th’ spirit to retain,
Nor will e’il deli’er those to war who’re giv’n.

18. The Wicked and the Righteous

I’ve seen wick’d men buried ’nd i’ their ossuary,
Those who used to do good and receive praise
And they’re soon forgott’n, this’s ’lso vanity.
The hearts o’th’ people are fill’d to do wrong wi’ schemes,
When th’ sentence for crime isn’t quickly carried out.
Though sinn’rs do ev’l hundr’d times and pr’long their lives,
It’ll do b’tter wi’ God-fearing men I know yet,
Because these men stand in fear before God,
But it will not be well wi’ the miscreant, 
Neither will they prolong their days like a shade. 
That takes place on earth there’s a vanity, 
Righteous men get th’ punishment of th’ wicked, 
And wicked men get th’ reward of th’ saintly. 
I say that this too is without meaning. 
And I commend joy of vivacity, 
Under the sun for man has no good thing, 
Except to eat and drink and be joyous, 
Then joy will go with him in his toiling. 
My mind applied to know wisd’m ‘nd see th’ business, 
And then I see all the work God has done. 
No one can comprehend what’s contin’ous. 
Despite all his efforts, man discov’rs none, 
Claims he knows but can’t even a wise man.

19. A common Destiny for All
Th’ righteous and th’ wise and their deeds are i’ God’s hands, 
No man knows eith’r love or hate b’fore by all. 
It’s th’ same for all, since th’ same event betides 
To th’ righteous and th’ wicked, th’ good and th’ evil, 
To th’ clean ‘nd th’ unclean, who off’rs and who not does. 
As it’s with the good man, so wi’ the sinful; 
And he who swears is as who an oath shuns. 
Th’ same destiny o’ertakes all, under th’ sun 
This is the evil i’ everyth’ng that happens. 
Full o’ evil and there’s madness, th’ hearts of men 
While living ’nd afterward they join th’ dead being. 
E’en a live dog is bett’r off than dead lion, 
There’s hope for whoe’r is joined wi’ all th’ living. 
The living knows that they’ll die, but th’ dead don’t;

福乐恶人失，
恶人岁影荫。 
人世原虚空， 
义人遭惩运， 
恶人受义功， 
吾谓此空虚， 
快乐余称颂。 
除却吃喝娱， 
别无世人乐， 
劳碌享欢愉。 
慧心看生活， 
通晓神工价。 
无人明沿革， 
费力难寻查， 
智者无觉察。 
义人智者神掌控， 
爱恨临面无声“诶”。 
同样遭遇同困窘 
义罪好恶洁与非， 
献祭与否无差异。 
好人罪人同运随； 
起誓无誓无参差。 
日下命同与众人， 
万事唯此为祸事。 
恶狂充盈活人心， 
随后归于死人帮。 
活狗不比死狮逊， 
相连活人有指望。 
活者知亡死人否，
They’ve no more r’ward e’en their mem’ry missing.

Their love, hate and ’nvy have ’lready perished,
They’ve no more share i’ all that’s done th’ sun under.
Go to eat and drink with a merry heart,

For what you do now is in God’s favor.
Be sure always to look happy ’nd merry.
Enjoy life with th’ wife whom you love ever,

All th’ days o’ your vain life are i’ your destiny.
For it’s your reward i’ life and in your toil.
For there’s no work, thought, lore, wisd’m i’ ossuary.

The race isn’t to th’ swift or to the strong th’ battle,
Nor does food come to th’ wise or wealth th’ brilliant
Because time and chance happen to them all.

As birds are taken in a snare, fish i’ net,
Men are trapped by e’il m’ment we least exp’ct it.

20. Wisdom Superior to Folly (Sonnet)
T’ me great th’ example o’ wisdom und’r th’ sun seemed:
A little city with few people i’ it,
A great king came against it and besieged,

And constructed large siegeworks it against.
Now there lived in th’ city a poor wise man,
And he by his wisdom delivered it.

Yet th’ poor man was not remembered by one.
So I said, “wisdom is bett’r than power.”
But despised is th’ wisdom of th’ poor person.

And the words aren’t heeded of th’ man who’s poor.
More to be heeded are th’ quiet words o’ th’ wise
Than among fools the shouting o’ a ruler.

Wisdom is better than battle weapons,
But a lot of good one bungler destroys.
21. Miscellaneous Observations

As dead flies give perfume a foul odor,
A little foll’ outweighs wisd’m and honor.

A wise man’s heart inclines him to the right,
A fool’s heart directs him to the left.

The fools lacks sense as they walk along th’ road,
And show to e’ryone how they are stupid.

Don’t leave th’ post, if ’gainst you th’ chief’s wrath ’rises,
For calmn’ss will lay to rest great offenses.

There’s an evil I’ve seen the sun under,
The sort o’ error that ’rises from ruler:

Oh, folly is set in great dignity,
And the rich sit in low locality.

I have seen some slaves riding on horses,
And walking like slaves on the land princes.

A man who digs a pit may ’nto it fall,
A snake may bite him who breaks though a wall.

He may be hurt by stones who them removeth,
And he may b’ threatened by logs who them cleaveth.

If dull ax isn’t sharpened, more strength must b’ put;
But bring success, w’sdom profit’ble to direct.

O if the serpent bites before charmed being,
How to charm a snake is o’ no use knowing.

The words from a wise man’s mouth are graceful,
But consumed by his own lips is a fool.

The start of th’ words o’ his mouth is foolishness,
And th’ end of his talk is evil madness.
The fool multiplies words, no one knows what'll occur,
And who can tell him what'll come him after?

A fool is wearied by his fool'sh toil so
How t' go a city that he doesn't e'en know.

Woe t' you, O land, when a child is your king,
And your princes feast gaily in th' morning!

Blessed are you, O land whose king is o' noble birth
And whose princes eat at prop'r time for strength.

If a man is lazy, the rafters sink;
If his hands are idle, the houses leak.

A feast for laughter, and wise for merry,
But th' answer for everything is money.

Even i' your thoughts, the king do not condemn,
Nor curse the rich even in your bedroom,
For your words may b' carried by bird o' th' heaven,
And th' winged creature will make the matter known.

22. What a Wise Man Does (Sonnet)

Please invest your money in trade foreign,
And one of these days you'll make a profit.
Give portions to seven, or t' eight even,

What disaster may happ'n for you know not.
When clouds are full, they empty rain on th' earth;
In th' place where the tree falls, there will lie it,

Whether a tree falls t' the south or to th' north.
The one he observes the wind shall not sow;
And he shall not reap the clouds that regardeth.

How th' breath comes to th' bones i' a womb you
don't know,
So you don’t know th’ work o’ God, who makes e’verything.
Both i’ th’ morning and i’ th’ evening you seed sow.
Which will prosp’r, this or that, for not knowing,
Or whether will be good both resembling.

23. Advice to Young People
Light is sweet, ’nd it pleases th’ eyes to see th’ sun.
So if man lives many years, let him ’njoy th’m all.
But let him r’call, that th’ days o’ dark’n’ss will be ’mpteen.

Everything to come is meaningl’sss on th’ whole.
Be happy, young man, while i’ adolescent,
And i’ th’ days o’ your youth let your heart you console.

Walk in the ways o’ your heart and your eyes sight.
But r’call God is gonna judge you for story.
Banish anxiety from th’ bott’ m o’ your heart,
And cast off the troubles of your body,
For youth and th’ dawn of life are vanity.

24. Remember Your Creator in Your Youth
Rem’mber your creator when you’re young i’ those day,
Before th’ evil days come and th’ years near tow,
“I find no pleasure i’ them”—when you will say.

Before the sun, light, moon and stars dark grow,
And the clouds return after the shower;
In th’ day when tremble th’ keepers o’ the chateau,
The strong men stoop and for few cease th’ grinder.
And those who look through th’ windows see dimly;
When the doors are shut on the thoroughfare,
Be ’ble t’ hear th’ mill as it grinds you’ll barely;
And one rises up at the sound o’ a bird;
And all the daughters o’ song will sing softly.
One is afraid o’ heights, and terrors are i’ th’ road;  
Hair white, Hardly be able t’ drag will you  
Yourself along ’nd desire no long’r is stirred.

Man t’ his ’ternal home, mourners ’bout th’ ’venue.  
B’fore silver cord snapp’d, and gold’n bowl broken  
And is broken at th’ fountain th’ jug i’ red hue.

And the cog-wheel broken at the cistern,  
And th’ dust returns to the earth as it was,  
And to God who gave it the breath return.

“Meaningless! Meaningless!” the teacher says.  
Vanity, vanity of vanities.

25. Epilogue (Sonnet)  
But because the philosopher was wise,  
On teaching th’ people what he knew he kept.  
He pondered, searched out and ’rranged many proverbs.

The Preacher sought to find words of delight,  
Uprightly he wrote words of precision.  
The words o’ the wise man are like goads to prompt,

Like nails firmly fixed are th’ collect’d mention,  
The mentions are given by our shepherd.  
Be warned, my son, o’ anything to them i’add’tion:

To the writing of books there is no end,  
A weariness o’ th’ body is much study.  
The end of the matter, all has been heard.

Fear God and keep his commands, it’s man’s duty.  
For ’nto judgment God will bring deed every.
References


About the Author

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