

Ecclesiastes 1:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

Analysis

The Preacher observes: 'All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.' The Hebrew 'yegeaim' (יגעאים), full of labour/wearisome) describes exhausting toil that never satisfies. Human language cannot fully express this weariness—'man cannot utter it' (לוֹיְקָהַל אִישׁ לְדַבָּר). The parallel phrases about eye and ear emphasize perpetual dissatisfaction: no amount of seeing satisfies visual appetite; no amount of hearing satiates auditory desire. This verse diagnoses the human condition: restless craving never satisfied by created things. Augustine famously prayed, 'Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.' Only the Creator satisfies the insatiable human soul created for Him.

Historical Context

Ancient peoples experienced this restlessness despite less stimulation than modern life provides. The eye and ear seeking satisfaction anticipated modern consumer culture's endless appetite for novelty and entertainment. Yet Ecclesiastes exposes the futility: accumulating experiences doesn't produce satisfaction. Jesus offered alternative: 'whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst' (John 4:13-14). Early church fathers contrasted worldly pleasures that increase desire with divine grace that satisfies. The Reformers emphasized that finite goods cannot satisfy infinite desires—only the infinite God suffices. Modern readers see

this verse diagnosing social media, streaming services, constant connectivity—endless consumption without satisfaction.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What evidence do you see that your 'eye is not satisfied with seeing'—constantly seeking new experiences, content, or possessions without lasting satisfaction?
2. How does this verse explain why accumulating experiences and knowledge often increases rather than decreases inner restlessness?

Interlinear Text

כָּל	לֹא	לֹדֶב	רָא	אֵשׁ	יָוֹכֵל	לֹא	יָגַע	יָמִים	פְּדָבֵר	יָמִים	כָּל
H3605		H3808		H3201		H376		H1696		H3808	
All things		cannot		man		utter					
H1697		H3023		H3201		H376		H1696		H3808	
מְשֻׁמְעָם	אֵזֶל	תָּמְלָא	אֵלָא	לֹרְאָה	וְתַ	עַזְלָה	תְּשַׁבֵּעַ	עַזְלָה	וְתַ	וְתַ	מְשֻׁמְעָם
is not satisfied	it the eye	with seeing									
H7646	H5869	H7200									
H3808		H4390									
filled											
H241		H8085									
nor the ear		with hearing									

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 27:20 (Parallel theme): Hell and destruction are never full; so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

Matthew 11:28 (Parallel theme): Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

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