

The Search for Meaning

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

Background to Ecclesiastes.

- i. Ecclesiastes is wisdom literature, not historical.
- ii. Ecclesiastes has some difficult, poetical, words .
- iii. Written in first person, as an experiment on wisdom.
- iv. Ecclesiastes asks the hard questions of life (v. 12:11).

It could be historical, but doesn't have to be.

The teacher finds that wisdom doesn't always work the way we expect.

Every day is a bad day. Realizing the randomness and brevity of life frees us to *enjoy life*.

“[Ecclesiastes] has cured me of setting my hope on a particular outcome, and protected me from becoming bewildered and disheartened by bad news.”

-- Carolyn Mahaney

Why study Ecclesiastes?

- i. We all experience dissatisfaction with life, death.
- ii. The author points us to the only suitable cure: God.

These are the kinds of questions the writer asks.

What is the meaning of life?

Why am I so unhappy?

Does God really care?

Why is there so much suffering and injustice in the world?

Is life really worth living?

Big Idea: Without God everything means less; therefore, turn to God and find enjoyment.

The words of the Preacher, the son of David,
king in Jerusalem. ² Vanity of vanities, says the
Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

³ What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? ⁴ A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.

⁵ The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. ⁶ The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. ⁷ All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again.

⁸ All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. ⁹ What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰ Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has been already in the ages before us. ¹¹ There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after. (Ecc 1:1-11).

Big Idea: Without God everything means less; therefore, turn to God and find enjoyment.

The search for meaning.

1. Human existence is fleeting (vv. 1-2).
2. Under the sun, there's no gain (vv. 3-11).
3. In the *futility of life*, God remains.

1. Human existence is fleeting (vv. 1-2).

“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” “² Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”

Who is the Teacher?

- i. Qoheleth - preacher, teacher, philosopher, spokesman, Ecclesiastes.
- ii. “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (vv. 1, 12).
- iii. “I have acquired great wisdom...” (v. 1:16; 1Kgs 3:12f).
- iv. But true wisdom is from God (vv. 12:11-14).**

There's an author and a teacher in Ecclesiastes. The teacher teaches, but the author composes it for us. What's written should be read through the lens of belief in God. Life isn't meaningless. It just means less without God.

Without God, life can feel meaningless.

- i. The teacher uses *hevel* 38 times in 12 chapters.
- ii. Life is *hevel*: Temporary, Meaningless, Empty, Smoke, Breath, Enigma, Absurdity ...
- iii. Temporary (Job 7:16, 9:29; Ps 39:5-6; Prov 31:30).
- iv. Lacks substance (Job 23:14).
- v. Idolatry, and Idols (Deut. 32:21; 1 Kgs 16:13, 26; Ps 115:8).

5 of the first 8 words are hevel.

Learn wisdom with The Teacher.

- i. He had everything, but it wasn't enough.
- ii. He shows us the futility of life without God.
- iii. In the world, we won't find satisfaction, either.
- iv. Put yourself in his shoes and learn.

2. Under the sun, there's no gain (vv. 3-11).

³ What does man gain by all the *toil* at which he *toils* under the sun? ... ⁸ All things are *full of weariness*; a man cannot utter it; the eye is *not satisfied* with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. ⁹ What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun ...”

At times, life can feel pointless.

- i. The sun, earth, wind, and streams get tired (vv. 3-8).
- ii. Mankind *never* sees/hears/does enough (vv. 8-11).
- iii. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? (Mt 16:26; Mk 8:36).
- iv. There's no gain to be had under the sun, and that's the point: **none need be sought**.

Life under the sun is brutal, and it shows no signs of getting easier. Under the sun, our work is cursed and often fails.

The same God who told us that life is hard, tells us he is near (Ps 34:18). Trust him.

3. In the *futility of life*, God remains.

- i. God provides food, drink, and work (Ecc 2:24).
- ii. Every person lives in God's sight (Ecc 2:26).
- iii. God's deeds are eternal (Ecc 3:14).
- iv. God empowers people to enjoy life (Ecc 5:19-20).
- v. So, trust and follow God (Ecc 12:13–14).

The author does this on purpose. Ecclesiastes is not a book about futility, but reality without God. Find God in the futility of life.

Let life's futility drive you to Christ and find lasting meaning in him (Gal 3:13; Rom 8:20-21).