

The Resurrection Redeems Everything

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

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Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; all is vanity.

⁹ Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings; they are given by one Shepherd. ¹² My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

- Ecclesiastes 12:8-14, ESV

And so we come to the end of the book of Ecclesiastes. Normally, I feel a sense of sadness when I come to the end of a book or a series of books, because I know the story I have loved so much has come to an end and there is no more. And as much as I have enjoyed our time in Ecclesiastes, I am not quite so sad to come to the end of the book, because I know it is not the end of the story. And today, we're going to explore what we've learned from Ecclesiastes and what we're told in the rest of God's story about the major themes raised in Ecclesiastes.

But first, I want to just say a few words about this epilogue section. The body of Ecclesiastes ends in 12:8, but then we have six verses of an Epilogue. My belief is that the body of Ecclesiastes is a sermon preached by Solomon toward the end of his life, and that this Epilogue was added to Solomon's sermon by someone who was there that day and heard him preach it and who published this sermon for God's people to read and consider. In this case, the same writer likely wrote the opening verse to the whole book. At least, that's how it reads to me. But it's also possible that Solomon could have written the opening and closing himself, as he took his sermon notes and turned them into a book for the people of God.

What we're told here, very briefly, is of the value of the wisdom literature of the Bible for helping us understand life under the sun. The "sayings of the wise" would include Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament, and then we could probably add the Book of James to them in the New Testament. They are helpful and are given to us by the Lord to provide motivation, direction, and stability in an often crazy life. We're then warned not to go beyond the words of Scripture in seeking to understand how to live, for going beyond Scripture in seeking wisdom for life can be very dangerous but also very wearying.

Then, we're told the conclusion: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the duty of all men or the whole duty of man. So, we are to repent and believe and strive to obey the Lord, for the day is coming when God will bring all things into judgment. But more on that verse later . . .

Intro: Vanity of Vanities, Says the Preacher

“*Vanity of Vanities.*” This is how Solomon has opened and closed the main body of this wonderful, strange, shocking, challenging, and helpful book. Ecclesiastes 1:2 and 12:8 are identical book-ends to the main body of this book:

Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

We’ve talked about the word translated as “vanity” – the Hebrew word *Hevel*. It means vapor or smoke, and *Hevel* of *hevels* is the intensive superlative form, like Holy of Holies or King of kings. Everything under the sun is *Hevel* of *hevel*, smoke of smoke, vapor of vapor, vanity of vanities. This is surely the most important thing Solomon the Preacher wants us to take away from his sermon.

We’ve talked about how we can pursue wisdom in this life and how we can receive with joy the good things in this life, but the reality is that we cannot do either of these things until we first acknowledge and accept the utter vaporousness of this life, the fleeting temporary and utterly incomprehensible and uncontrollable nature of it. Life in this world under the sun does not last and cannot be grasped. Trying to make it last or trying to grasp it – either by trying to control or understand it – will lead to a maddening frustration; such pursuits are indeed a chasing after wind.

What Makes Life Vanity?

And yet, we do so much resent the fleeting and incomprehensible nature of this life, don’t we? Mayflies have the shortest life span of any animal under the sun, living just one day. Yet I don’t recall ever hearing any of them complain about the brevity of their lives or the futility and frustration of it all. Yet something within us groans under the burden of a life that passes so quickly and is so utterly impossible to grasp. Why?

We’re given hints of this in Ecclesiastes.

- *What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. – 1:15*
- *Consider the work of God: who can make straight what he has made crooked? – 3:13*

These verses show that we have an internal sense of straight-ness, such that we can see and know that things in the world are crooked, and even if they were made that way by God, we long to see them made straight, even though we are unable to do it ourselves.

Also, consider Ecclesiastes 3:11 – *“He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”*

So, not only do we have an internal sense of straightness, but we also have eternity in our hearts, something which God has given us. So, the crookedness of life bothers us, but so does its brevity. Even

if life was all good and we weren't faced with the maddening crookedness of seeing the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper, we would still be faced with the short span of years we have compared to what we think we should have. As it is, we are faced with both realities, as we read last week in Psalm 90:10 –

*The years of our life are seventy,
or even by reason of strength eighty;
yet their span is but toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.*

A. What is the Purpose of Wisdom & Pleasure?

Despite the vanity of life under the sun, what are we called to pursue? Solomon the Preacher repeatedly commends wisdom and pleasure. He cautions us strongly against the wrong pursuit of these things. We can't turn pleasure into the ultimate goal in life, grasping for maximum pleasure and minimum pain, or we will be chasing wind and end up crushed with disappointment. Also, we cannot seek to use wisdom as a means to gain for ourselves riches or honor. While wisdom often does lead to these things, we have no guarantees in this life under the sun and that's not why we're to seek wisdom.

So, then, if pleasure is not the ultimate goal in life and if wisdom is not a means to achieve wealth and honor for ourselves, what is their purpose? Solomon encourages us to enjoy life; God even commands it, as we saw in chapter 9 –

Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.

Let your garments be always white. Let not oil be lacking on your head.

*Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun
– 9:7-9*

And we're told at the end of chapter 9 that wisdom is better than might and better than weapons of war. But why? What purpose do they serve?

Wisdom shows us how to live, how to discern what is right and best to do in life. Wisdom helps us take the principles and precepts laid down in God's word and know how to apply them to the life situations we find ourselves in. In other words, wisdom helps us live lives that glorify God.

But we are not just called to glorify God. We are also called to enjoy Him. As the very famous first question of the Westminster Catechism says, our chief end (singular) is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. We cannot separate the two. Wisdom helps us live lives that glorify God, but receiving with thanksgiving and enjoying with a merry heart the good things God gives us helps us enjoy God. In God's good gifts, we see His goodness, His generosity, and as we receive and enjoy them with thankful hearts, we are enjoying Him. That's why striving and grasping and complaining and grumbling short-circuit the

enjoyment of God. If we think we're entitled or we think we are being cheated, not only are we deceived, but we certainly aren't enjoying God through the enjoyment of His gifts. It also helps us further understand why joy is commanded. Not only are we seeing things rightly – that God is gracious and we are blessed – but we are actively enjoying God when we rejoice in the Lord, when we receive with joy and thanksgiving His good gifts.

B. What Do We Really Need?

So, we can see that wisdom and joy are keys to glorifying and enjoying God in this life under the sun, keys to living rightly and not chasing after wind. And yet, we find it really hard to live wise and joyful lives, don't we? We struggle to apply God's word to life and to choose joy over grumbling or anxiety. That's because we don't just live in a crooked world, we also have crooked hearts.

“Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.” – 7:20

So, we don't just need to live longer in a better world, we also need to be better to remove the *Hevel* of life and make things the way we know they should be. *Hevel* is just another way of talking about the curse on Creation and within ourselves, the deep brokenness that makes life as hard as it is short.

Some people think Ecclesiastes is so dark because it's an Old Testament book, and it reflects Old Testament realities. They think it's devoid of the hope of the New Testament, which takes away the *Hevel* of life, the frustration and brevity. They think that life may be hard and short in the Old Testament, but when you turn the page into the New Testament, that's not the case anymore.

I think such a simplistic understanding of things short-changes the hope to be found in the Old Testament, even in Ecclesiastes, and it also understates the hard realities of life that are still very much present in the New Testament. Yes, it's true that Solomon the Preacher doesn't present us with much of a vision of life after death or the coming resurrection, but he does give us some glimpses of powerful hope:

Solomon has hope that a final and perfect justice is coming: *“Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him. But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.” - 8:12-13*

Even in death, there is hope: *“. . . the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” – 12:7*

In today's passage, Solomon continues to develop the theme of the coming justice that will make everything right, in the closing words of the book: *“For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*

So, there's more hope than we sometimes see at first, even in Ecclesiastes. And there's more hard reality in the New Testament, too. Romans 8 is my favorite chapter in the Bible, partly because it faces the hard realities unflinchingly and offers us real and strong hope in the face of those realities:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. – Rom. 8:18-25, ESV

The word “futility” here in Romans 8 (“the creation was subjected to futility”) is the Greek translation of *Hevel* from Ecclesiastes. So, here is the reality of *Hevel* for both the Creation and for us, right in the middle of Romans 8. Yet, something has happened. Now the *Hevel*, while still very much real and pressing, cannot be compared to the glory that will be revealed, even though the hope of that glory remains unseen.

Something does change when we get to Romans 8, but it is a progression, a development, a deepening of what was already present in Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes envisions a future hope, but that future hope becomes much more personal and substantial after the resurrection of Jesus. The river of hope was flowing in the Old Testament, but it gets so much deeper after the resurrection of Jesus, and when He comes again, it will flood the whole earth.

The resurrection of Jesus allows the eternal life of joy and glory to break into the *Hevel* of this passing life under the sun like a beam of light powerful enough to pierce the darkness and put things in their right perspective. The *Hevel* does not go away, but now we know “*that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*”

It reminds me of the hope Samwise Gamgee got one dark night in Mordor:

peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty for ever beyond its reach. His song in the Tower had been defiance rather than hope; for then he was thinking of himself. Now, for a moment, his

own fate, and even his master's, ceased to trouble him. He crawled back into the brambles and laid himself by Frodo's side, and putting away all fear he cast himself into a deep untroubled sleep.

This is the hope the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of eternal life in Him and with Him brings to us in this life under the sun. It's not that we're no longer under a Shadow, because we are. It's not that we don't still have many miles to go in a world that sometimes feels like Mordor, for we do. It's that we can see, by faith, because of the resurrection of Jesus, the truth that "light and high beauty" live forever beyond the reach of the Hevel of this life, and the Shadow of death and frustration that hangs over our heads is indeed a small and passing thing.

C. How Does the Resurrection Redeem Everything?

The resurrection of Jesus brings this kind of transforming hope, because the resurrection of Jesus secures our own future resurrection, and the future restoration of all things:

. . . the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Life is too brief. The world is crooked. Our hearts are crooked. We were made to glorify and enjoy God, but these three realities of life under the sun undermine our chief end and subject us, with creation, to futility, and not willingly. Our desire for wisdom and for joy – by which we might glorify and enjoy God - are continually short-circuited either by the brevity of life or by the crookedness of the world or by the crookedness of our own hearts.

The resurrection, then, redeems everything. Creation will be freed from its bondage to decay. Sin and evil will finally be completely and permanently eradicated from God's good creation. We will be made right, fully and gloriously, in both body and soul. And we will live in the New Creation forever.

We've already seen in Romans 8 how "*the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.*" Now, let's see how we will be set free:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ *“O death, where is your victory?*

O death, where is your sting?” – I Corinthians 15:51-55, ESV

So, our bodies will be raised to be imperishable and immortal. But what about our hearts, our souls?

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. – I John 3:2, ESV

So, creation will be delivered, our bodies will be raised imperishable, and our souls will be perfected, to be like Jesus forever. The resurrection redeems everything.

What is the other famous refrain of frustration and futility in this life under the sun from Ecclesiastes? Not only is everything vanity of vanities and so many of our human pursuits a chasing after wind, but also life is frustrating because “there is nothing new under the sun.” We are trapped in a world where nothing is ever truly new. People may come up with new, high-tech ways of doing the same old things, but there’s nothing truly new under the sun.

Now, listen to how the story ends –

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

⁵ *And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”*

– Revelation 21:1-5

When Jesus returns, we will be ushered in glorious resurrection bodies and sinless, God-glorifying Christ-like souls from a world “under the sun” where nothing is ever new into a new heavens and a new earth which needs no sun, “*for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb*” a world in which God will be making all things new.

Some people do worry about what life will be like in the resurrection in the New Heavens and the New Earth. They wonder if they'll miss our life under the sun. I hope what we've already seen will show that we have so much to look forward to and nothing to fear –

1. We will be raised to eternal life in bodies that will never die.
2. We will be on a New Earth enjoying a Creation that has been freed from its bondage to decay and is fully glorious and more truly alive than we've ever experienced.
3. We will be with Jesus, and seeing Him face-to-face will transform us forever into His perfect likeness.
4. We will be free from sin, frustration, futility, and death forever.
5. All things will be made NEW!

So, what about the good things of this life? Will they be lost and will we miss them?

Here's what we're told about life in the New Jerusalem:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

– Revelation 21:22-27

“The kings of the earth will bring their glory into it . . . They will bring into it the glory and honor of the nations.”
We don't know exactly what these verses mean, but they do seem to clearly say that all of the best of life in this world will be brought into New Jerusalem. In short, we will not miss anything good from our lives in this world, but we will be able to enjoy it all without any shadow of futility or frustration.

Where is Your Hope?

As we close our time in Ecclesiastes together, I want to finish by considering one final big question: What are you living for? What is your hope?

Ecclesiastes has mostly been teaching what is not worth living for or putting our hope in – all of the passing things of life under the sun. But we must live for something. Hope is vital to the flourishing of the human soul. Proverbs 13:12 says, *“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life.”* If you put your hopes in the vaporous things of life under the sun, your hope will always be fleeting, always deferred, always making your heart sick. But if your hope is firmly fixed on Christ and His coming

glory in the Resurrection Day of the Lord, then your desires will be fulfilled on that day and you will be able to eat of the tree of life and enjoy the full satisfaction of your soul for all eternity.

17 Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18 For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

– Philippians 3:17-21, ESV

In this life, we walk in wisdom and we enjoy the gifts of God best when we keep our perspective fixed on eternity. Wisdom and joy help us best glorify God and enjoy Him during our fleeting life under the sun, until the day comes when we will enter into the joy of His presence and then we will glorify Him and enjoy Him perfectly, undiminished by sin or futility, forever and ever.

He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. – Revelation 22:20-21, ESV