

From Frustration to Fulfillment
(Wrapping Up Ecclesiastes)
Selected Scriptures
Read: Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Bethany Baptist Church
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Turn w/ me to Ecclesiastes 3:1-14

There is a *time* for everything, and it's *time* to *wrap-up* Ecclesiastes!

Let's start w/ a brief reminder of some Ecclesiastes *trivia*:

- Author – *King Solomon*. The wisest & wealthiest man of his time. In Eccl we see him as *seeker, scholar, king, philosopher, & preacher* (= “*Eccl*”).
- Solomon wrote Eccl *late in life*, so around **935 B.C.**
- *Wisdom literature* → instructions on how to live life before God. *Job, Prov, SoS, Eccl*
- *Form: documentary, poetry, proverbs, metaphors, admonitions, conclusion (epilogue).*
- Key words & expressions: ***vanity*** (= *emptiness, futility, vapor*), *under the sun, ... fear God*.
- We won't understand Eccl unless we *define “under the sun.”* It's all about *perspective*. Life *under the sun* is life lived as if ***God isn't there***, or ***God doesn't care***.
- We won't understand Solomon's *documentary* unless we understand *why* he wrote it. What was Solomon *searching for?* *Fulfillment. Life's meaning. Making a difference.*
- **Solomon found it!** You *can untangle life*, & you *can make a difference!* Let's remember what Ecclesiastes taught us...

Three *final words* to help you wrap your head around the wisdom of Ecclesiastes:

1. **Frustration.** *Vanities of vanities! All is vanity.* (8:14-15)
2. **Fulfillment.** *Remember also your Creator.* (12:13-14)
3. **Foundation.** *Consider the work of God.* (7:13-14)

...pray...

My first Eccl keyword is *frustration*. “*Vanities of vanities! All is vanity.*”

1. “*Looking for love in all the wrong places...too many faces.*” **Johnny Lee** sang that, but it could’ve been *Solomon*, in *more ways than one!* Solomon’s problem was that he started out looking, *under the sun...*
2. Solomon’s long looks for life’s *meaning* almost always ended in *frustration* – so many things turned out to be so *pointless*. You can read thru Eccl & watch *frustration* unfold itself in **three** ways: *emptiness, irony, injustice*.
 - a. **Emptiness.** → *the defn of vanity!* *Marie Antoinette* (that famously bored/*headless!* French aristocrat) – “**Nothing tastes.**” Solomon had already come to the *same conclusion*.
 - i. Ecclesiastes almost immediately introduced Solomon’s long *itinerary of fulfillment adventures*:
 - ii. *Pleasure, laughter, fine foods, beautiful homes, lovely grounds & gardens, servants, livestock, treasures, entertainers, sensual satisfaction, power, wisdom ...*
 - iii. It all sounded good *at first*, but eventually it all rang *hollow*.
1:10,11: *All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor & this was my reward for all my labor. Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done & the labor which I had exerted, & behold all was vanity & striving after wind & there was no profit under the sun.*

b. **Irony.** Life doesn't always *turn out* the way *it seems it should...*

- i. Slaves *ride* & princes *walk like slaves*. Apparent *advantage* doesn't seem to matter.
- ii. **9:11 – I again saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift & the battle is not to the warriors, & neither is bread to the wise nor wealth to the discerning nor favor to men of ability; for time & chance overtake them all.**



- iii. *Athlete & soldier & scholar & investor & specialist.* All this *advantage*, and still...*championships & wars are lost, hunger strikes, fortune & favor slip away*. It's all *in vain...*
- iv. *Bitter irony!* Here's *all* you can say, if you're still only looking *under the sun*: no man is immune to *bad timing & bad breaks!*
- c. **Injustice.** *Individuals & governments; commoners & kings* don't always do the *right things...*
- i. **3:16 – I have seen under the sun that in the place of justice there is wickedness & in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.**
- ii. *King Solomon* was particularly interested in *civil affairs*. Do *governments & rulers & the exercise of power* assure a *full & meaningful life* for the *man on the street*?
- iii. Not *always!* In fact the king confesses that one of the functions of *bureaucracy* is to watch other *bureaucrats* (**5:8**): *If you see oppression of the poor & denial of justice & righteousness in the provinces, do not be shocked at the sight, for one official watches over another official, and there are higher officials over them.*
- iv. And then you *die!* *Rich man & poor man. Prince & slave. Wise & foolish, alike.* Talk about *emptiness & irony & ... it just doesn't seem fair!*

3. But Solomon often admits, life can be *frustrating*, but not necessarily *miserable*.
 - a. Solomon frequently stops & balances all the *emptiness* w/ some *upbeat advice*: You should *make the most of life*, even *under the sun*.
 - b. Turn w/ me to just *one* example in 8:14-15 (read).
 - i. **V.14** – Here is a *frustrating* blend of *irony* & *injustice*. **Bad things** happen to *good people* (as if they were *wicked*). **Good things** happen to *bad people* (as if they were *righteous*)! *What's up w/ that!*
 - ii. → **Futility!** (keyword) Solomon says it **2X**. *Emptiness from beginning to end. Futility from first to last.*
 - iii. So here is Solomon's **temporary solution** (appeals to it often in Eccl): “**Do the best you can.**”
 - iv. **V.15** - *Eat, drink & be merry. Live for today.* Don't ask many *hard questions*. This “*eat, drink & be merry*” cycle is Eccl **coping mechanism** for the *frustrations of life under the sun*.
 - c. **Is that all there is?** Is that *all* you were **created for**? To *drown your long-term frustrations in short-term pleasures?* PAUSE.
 - d. The wise king says it *again*. In fact, he says it *twice*: *It doesn't get any better than this, under the sun.*

The first word in summing up Solomon's search for meaning is *frustration...*
***Frustration is the first word, but not the last word!* ☺**

My second key word is fulfillment. Remember also your Creator.

1. Don't you dare *misunderstand* Eccl: you *can* have a *full & meaningful life!*
 2. The *secret* is *simple*, but you won't find it *under the sun*: **fear God!** It might surprise you that a book that is famous for *under the sun* futility has been urging you to *fear God* all along! (But, *Eccl* is an **OT wisdom book**, ...)
 - a. **3:14 – I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it & there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that man should fear Him.**
 - b. **5:7 – For in many dreams & in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.**
 - c. **7:18 - ...the one who fears God comes forth with all.**
 - d. **8:12 – Although a sinner does evil a hundred times & may lengthen his life [bitter irony!], still I know that it will be well for those who fear God, who fear Him openly.**
 - e. **8:13 – But it will not be well for the evil man & he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because He does not fear God.**
 - f. **(One more imp't *fear God* text, but I'll save it for just a minute!)**
3. The *soul-fulfilling fear of God* is fueled by the fear of God's *unavoidable judgment!*
 - a. One of life's biggest *frustrations* is the thought that *wrongs* won't be *set right*. That the *wicked* won't be punished, that the *balances* won't be *leveled*. Solomon says *they will!*
 - b. **3:17 – I said to myself, “God will judge both the righteous man & the wicked man,” for a time for every matter & for every deed is there.**
 - c. Solomon presses man's *accountability to God* on **young** men & women. *Youth* is the best time to *enjoy life*, but *pleasure* doesn't mean *moral carelessness*. Young people need to know that God *sees* them & God will *judge* them!

- d. *Teenagers, young adults*, do you remember God's word for you in Eccl 11? **11:9 – Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, & let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart & the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.**
 - e. Young friends, your Bible urges you to come to the Lord when you are **young**, because it won't get *easier when you are old*: **Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come...** (“evil days”? – just ask your grand-parents!)
4. *Fulfillment*, not *vanity*, is the main point in Ecclesiastes. So that's the *last truth* Solomon leaves with you! **Let's look @ 12:13-14 together.**
- a. Solomon says *here is my final & comprehensive comment on the meaning of life*. The Preacher says it *emphatically* (lit.): **God thou shalt fear & His commandments thou shalt keep**
 - b. This *truth* is for *all* men & women. Again, Solomon anchors the *worship & service* of the LORD in the reality of His *judgment* (**14 – last verse in Solomon's documentary**).
5. Let's sum up the *key to fulfillment* & the *big idea* in Eccl: 1.) *Fear God*. 2.) *Fear God's judgment*. 3.) *Remember God early*. 4.) *Fear Him & obey Him* (= *worship God & serve Him*).

The first word in summing up Ecclesiastes is *fulfillment*. The young man (old!) who fears & follows God has found the key to a *life that makes a difference*.

My third keyword for understanding Ecclesiastes is *foundation*. Solomon cements everything in life to a theological foundation: Consider the work of God (2x).

1. I want to point out **three** fundamental truths that Ecclesiastes teaches about the *God of the Bible*: God as *Creator*, ...*Judge*, ...*King*.
 - a. God as *Creator*. **12:1**- *Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth.* **Genesis 1:1** teaches you that God created **everything**, then turns around & reminds you that means God created **you, too**. *Creation* suggests *accountability*.
 - b. God as *Judge*. Speaking of *accountability*, we've already seen that Solomon pictures God as *Judge*. *God will judge the righteous man & the wicked man*. That means God will judge you too.
 - c. God as *King*. The *King of Israel* feared the *King of Heaven*. God actively **rules** every *thing* & every *moment* & every *man/woman*. We call that the *Doctrine of the Sovereignty of God*.
 - d. One of Ecclesiastes loveliest reminders of God's *wise* & *omnipotent rule* is that poem that begins **ch.3 (read vv.1-8; 11-14)**. Did you note **v.1 – appointed**; life's events are *appointed* (by Who?). Did you see **v.11 – eternity in their heart**; you know God's there, even though He's *other* than you. Did you catch that last statement (**v.14**): *recognizing that God is your King should lead you to holy fear!*
2. The Preacher of Eccl has built the case that the man/women who lives life *under the sun* **won't** see *God's hand* in her life & **won't** acknowledge God's *claim* on her life. So she grows frustrated – *life is pointless!*
3. The *answer* is to *see His hand, bow before His throne, & worship & serve Him*. Beloved, *fulfillment & meaning* begin in accepting His *reign*!

*Consider the work of God,
For who is able to straighten what He has bent?
In the day of prosperity be happy,
But in the day of adversity consider –
God has made the one as well has the other.*

The foundation for happiness is theological: God is your Owner & Judge & King.

King Solomon set off in search of *meaning*. He had the resources to look practically *everywhere*!

Here was his very *first* word: ***vanity***. ... “*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity & striving after the wind.*” **Life under the sun can be so frustrating.**

Here is his very *last* word: ***God. Remember your Maker. ... God thou shall serve & His commandments thou shall keep. Life doesn't have to be frustrating. Embrace the right foundation, & fulfillment will be yours!***

Vanity or God... frustration or fulfillment...

Which *foundation* will you build your life on?

The Lord calls you to choose – *which will it be for you?*

...pray...

Hymn?