

## Ecclesiastes 1

Last week we took a quick glimpse into the book of proverbs. Its an amazing read to say the least and there is so much to be gained from the wisdom of Solomon I thought we should take another look. Solomon really lays out for us in the Proverbs the right way for us to live our lives and at the same time he also he shows us the wrong way to do things. I like that balance. Both sides of this teaching style are really effective. We can learn from the best but also we can gain considerable knowledge by watching or listening to someone do or say the wrong things and avoid what they were doing.

Ecclesiastes follows that “learn from my mistake” style of teaching. Its another one of Solomon's books that deals with the daily life. We all need direction and help but with Ecclesiastes Solomon takes a very different approach than any other book of the bible. The main focus of Ecclesiastes isn't the existence of God, or the facts to prove there is a God, Solomon is a believer in God and by this time in his life he knows God is real and God is and will always be there.

The picture Solomon chooses to paint is whether or not God *matters* and he does do this by taking the perspective of a person who has decided to do things from their own understanding and leave God out of the equation all together. Studying Ecclesiastes is daunting and at times even depressing but if we understand what Solomon is saying we can clearly see a life without God is not a life that anyone would want to live.

For reference this book was written around 1000 years before Jesus was even born. Ecclesiastes is considered Wisdom Literature and is mostly about the practical, earthy, day to day stuff of life that we all deal with. This style of Old Testament Wisdom Literature includes Job, which studies the problem of evil and human suffering; Song of Songs discusses the beauty of love and pleasure;

Proverbs teaches how to worship God with everything from our finances to our friends and family; and Ecclesiastes explores the findings of a self focused person who ultimately finds a meaningless life.

Ecclesiastes kind of rambles on and wanders around from thought to thought. As wise as he was it is comforting to know that Solomon did not have all the answers..Life is not a formula that can be calculated, its not as cut and dried as we think and its ever changing and always moving.

However, God doesn't change and this book represents a thought process we all have faced. Its not a conversation between man and God, like Job or one of the Prophets. There are no vs in this book where God speaks directly to Solomon. It is really is just the long thought process of one man as he tries to figure this life out. He starts off with an encouraging vs..

***Eccl 1:1-2The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher;"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."***

As a reminder, Solomon is the epitome of a prodigal son. Even though he was born into the affluence of his father David, a man after Gods own heart, Solomon kinda went sideways for a season, he drifted from the ways of God to indulge his own pointless passions.

Now, as an older, wiser man he penned this book as he had finally come to grips with the folly of his wayward ways. He returned to the Lord, and wrote an honest transcript of the empty and shallow life that he discovered apart from God. Solomon sought everything that life had to offer, and then realized that nothing, repeat nothing can compare to a life lived in obedience to God.

Solomon summed up his great life experiment with one word that appears all over the 12 chapters of Ecclesiastes..Vanity..the Hebrew word “hebel.” The word is nearly impossible to nail down in its essential meaning. Different Bible scholars translate the word in a variety of ways from meaningless to vanity, to emptiness.

Other times in scripture this same word refers to a vapor, something that is wispy, fleeting, elusive, and quickly gone. Doesn't matter which translation you choose, they all carry the same similar definition.. Anything we wish to substitute in our lives besides God is vanity, worthless and temporary. Looking back upon his life, Solomon writes arguably the most brutal, painful, and truthfully one of the most helpful book ever written to those of us who may have thoughts about a life lived outside of Gods design.

***Eccl 1:3-8***

***What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun?***

***4 One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever.***

***5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose.***

***6 The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit.***

***7 All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again.***

***8 All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing.***

Notice there this little clue “under the sun.” This phrase appears over and over in Ecclesiastes and speaks of a life lived without a connection to God while here on earth. A godless life lived by our limited insights and wisdom, information gleaned solely by our experiences without any word from God on the matter. It's a way of life the modern church calls a “worldly” view of life. Life as we see it, not as God sees it.

Right off the bat Solomon makes things really easy to understand, people are born, people die, the sun rises and sets, the wind blows, the water flows to the sea and man, even though he works and works and has food and shelter and may gather a few cool toys, he is rarely satisfied and so back to work he goes.. to gain more and more and make the best of this life, “under the sun”...in other other words, if this is all there is then I'm gonna get all that I can, now. It's a continual cycle that is centered on the premise that this is all there is and sadly, its a life that has lost perspective on what is all about. Jesus spoke about this worldly pursuit in **Mark 8:34-36**

***"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.***

**35 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. 36 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?**

The pursuit of the world, even though we may catch it will only leave us empty and unfulfilled.. I have seen it over and over and I'm sure you have as well, those who get all they wanted and yet its just not enough. **Ps**

**65:3- You will provide atonement for them. 4 Blessed is the man You choose, And cause to approach You, That he may dwell in Your courts.**

**We shall be satisfied with the goodness of Your house,**

**Of Your holy temple.** This has to be the pursuit of our lives.. to know and be known by God. It is our number 1

Solomon continues with his uplifting message...

**Eccl 1:9-11 That which has been is what will be, That which is done is what will be done, And there is nothing new under the sun.**

**10 Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this is new"? It has already been in ancient times before us.**

**11 There is no remembrance of former things, Nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come By those who will come after.** What a downer...

We can be so easily fooled into thinking that new is improved. Remember to keep this in mind, Ecclesiastes is not some old book. Ecclesiastes is the word of God and therefore it is an eternal book and able to speak to any generation that may read it and want to learn from it..There is a huge difference between the two. An old book gets old and outdated like and old set of encyclopedias.. Information has changed and becomes useless.. An eternal book never grows outdated, its always able to speak into the here

and now. **Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.** Then, now and forever..

The evolutionary chart in school draws us to a false line of thinking, tricking us into believing that history is a straight line going up and we are more advanced than those people who came before us. Solomon tells us the real truth, history is really a circle, One generation after another drives around that circle trying to outdo their neighbor with more stuff, more power, more information, and more fame.

Technology increases, things get faster and maybe even better but by no means are they new, they are just reinventions of an existing product or idea.. Polished up maybe, maybe even better..(phones) but still not new. We mistake movement for progress, we use words like innovation and groundbreaking, but lets put this into perspective there really is nothing original left, sliced bread is still the bar. Its all just improved or revised copies of something that already exists..

So far, Solomon has been a giant downer. At this point even though we are early into this book I would take anything hopeful or at least some sort of good news. However, it's not to be found here under the sun, Solomon has made that perfectly clear. We have to start looking elsewhere. Only in God do we find the hope for anything new..

If it wasn't for Jesus we would have nothing new. He came to this earth and brought things to us that the world had never seen before, truly new. **Luke 22:20-21** **"This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.** This new covenant between God and man was only the beginning.. Because of this belief in Jesus we get a huge prize package if you will.. all brand new.. **2 Cor 5:17-18 if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**

**Born again.. brand new and not just us all thing,** we get a *A new nature* (Ephesians 4:24). *a fresh new heart..A new purity* (1 Corinthians 5:7). *A new community* (Ephesians 2:14). *new commands to keep us on track* (John 13:34). and really the best thing of all.. **Rev 3:11-13 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown. 12 He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.** A new home and a new name

When see all the world has to offer there really is nothing here that we need. All that has been prepared for us is waiting in a different place. We can chase these things under the sun and at times it feels as though we are winning but nothing, repeat nothing could ever come close to what God has set aside for us..

Solomon continues in chapter 1 with even more good news.. Eccl 1:12-18  
*I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.*  
*15 What is crooked cannot be made straight,  
And what is lacking cannot be numbered.*  
*16 I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." 17 And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind.*  
*18 For in much wisdom is much grief,  
And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.*

He seems like the kind of guy you wanna hang around all day with..all of this wisdom and yet there doesn't seem to be any answers. God has set us in this place not to find those answers.. we are here to find Him..**Rom 8:20-21 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;**

Do you see that? God designed this thing to not make any sense, He put things in motion that cannot be figured out by searching, seeking, learning etc. There are things in this life that simply do not work and yet they do, things that should happen and yet they don't..

It seems like we should be able to figure somethings out and yet we always seem to find our way all the way back to the start with no real gains. Its no accident, its a purposed plan, perfectly designed so that mankind, you and I will seek out the truth and eventually, through what seems like vanity and hopelessness, look to the only hope we have to find reason and purpose..The hope that was waiting to be found by every man woman and child that walks this earth.. God Himself is the answer Solomon and all of us are looking for.

Solomon calls this task of searching “burdensome”.. and it sure can be sometimes not because God has hidden Himself and make things hard but rather because we make it that way. Pride, selfishness, distrust, misplaced faith on and on we could go but those things cloud our vision as we try to make up our own answers to things that only God knows.

These struggles can be answered in the person of Jesus. His words only amplify the better path.. ***Matt 11:29-30 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.***

You can rest assured that there were things in Jesus life that did not make sense, His birth in the lowliest of states, His rejection by those He came to save, His betrayal and abandonment by His closest allies, He willingly suffered as you and I, ***Isa 53:3-4 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted.***

To find an answer for the life of Jesus is an impossible task until God makes it clear.. the answer to all of this is found only at the cross..***Isa 53:5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed.***

Here's the truth we all need to hear.. the only reason for the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was for you and I.. all of the suffering of Jesus for you and I, the rejection for you and I. All of it, making a new way, bringing a new hope so that we could be reunited with the God who created us..that is reason for this entire process.. the only answer to any question we will ever have is Jesus