

ECCLESIASTES SERIES

Chap 1

We're in a series in Ecclesiastes, and we'll be here for a number of weeks.

A book that focuses on our shared human experience. It is not "preachy" with lots of biblical words or language.

Ecclesiastes is a book for those whose life has been off script, and for the rest of you as well. It is a book of Wisdom literature that may not always feel like it, but if we're open, it will take us behind the facades we like to create and speak to real life issues.

Wisdom is not what you know but how quickly you adjust when the opposite proves true. - Robert Brault

David Gibson...Wisdom Literature asks, what does it mean to fear the Lord in the world the Lord has made? Along with Job, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes is a meditation on what it means to be alive in a world that God made and called good, yet which has also gone so very wrong, often in catastrophic ways.

Ecclesiastes is a bit like real life intruding on our childhood pretend games. In those games we always catch the Super Bowl winning touchdown pass. We always hit the walk off home run in the bottom of the 9th inning. We're the Marvel Super Hero who always prevails. Everyone has a grand time at the "tea party" and the dolls/ stuff animals are BFF's.

And then, "bam", real life breaks in and we remember that life isn't as tidy as our "let's pretend" world.

AS AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK I'd like us to watch a video STUDY from The Bible Project 8 MINUTES- <https://thebibleproject.com/all-videos/?q=&category=read-scripture-old-testament&page=2>

The Preacher is what the person calls himself, who is speaking to us in this book, and his message you will see summarized in verse 2. His message is basically that all man's efforts to find happiness apart from God are useless. This life, apart from God, is meaningless, it is hopeless, and it is only filled with despair.

** But it's not just for the unbeliever; for the believer life is "hevel" – smoke and at times absurd.

Now, that's an important message, because from the very beginning chapters of the book of Genesis, the Old Testament asserts this fundamental truth: that there is a Creator, He is distinct from His creation, we are His creatures, and we are not Him; and the essence of life consists in glorifying and enjoying that Creator and honoring Him as the One who is the Lord and Sovereign.

And so it is perfectly appropriate that there would be a book in the Old Testament that sets forth what happens when you attempt to live life against that truth or without that truth. If you attempt to live life under the sun, if you attempt to live life apart from the reality of a Creator that has brought all things into being and made us for Himself, then this will happen.

That's basically the story of the book of Ecclesiastes. It is an exploration of the different ways that people try to find meaning in this life apart from God, and it is an explanation of how futile that is

The Six A's of The Preacher and Hebel

1. Attestation of competence. 1:1; 12-13

The author begins in verse 1, by attesting to his competence. He's basically saying, "Look, I have had a range of experience which uniquely enables me to explore the question of the meaning of life with you." **The author is speaking from a position of knowledge and experience that qualifies him to ask and answer hard questions.**

The "preacher/teacher" is like the guide on a tour bus. His job is to point out the unique interesting sites along the way. He knows the city and the odd curious stories. But this tour guide seems a bit edgy and in some ways gloomy or somber.

Eswine: EX: Two tour guides in Poland- they take you to Warsaw and Auschwitz. One guide is matter of fact, but the other seems more moved and melancholy. During an afternoon break you learn that his family had lived through the history. The other guide did not have this experience. In Ecclesiastes, our preacher is like that guide who has experienced what he is about to tell us.

2. The key Assertion – VANITY OF VANITIES; ALL IS VANITY. 1:2

An emotional/spiritual/psychological shock and awe approach to jolting us into reality.

The Preacher is saying that life is hebel – vanity- enigma – vapor especially, but not exclusively, when lived only with the horizons of this world.

It's as if the preacher has a glimpse or insight into what Eden was like, and now he sees the world in its fallen mess.

Preach the Gospel. Die. Be Forgotten – Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf

3. Advantage / Ambiguity – v 3 What advantage does a man have in all his work? Is it worth it?

What profit is there? This question is the key to the first section of the book. Verses 4-11 try to give an answer.

THE GAIN is not a monetary issue. It is gain in terms of what is meaningful or lasting and what is not. Will I leave behind something that will last?

None of our endeavors, apart from God, can supply life with significance and meaning." That's why you find so many songs about working hard, and getting nothing for it. That's why you find so many songs about the quest for meaning and the frustration of that quest for meaning. "Dust in the wind, all we are is dust in the wind."

Now, that's a cheerful song for a Top 40 hit. Why do we buy that? Because there are people out there that are asking that question, and they're experiencing that futility. None of our endeavors, apart from God, can supply life with significance and meaning, and no little, trite sayings can supply that significance and meaning.

We all know that the Miss America response doesn't really work. "The reason I live life, what gives meaning to my life, is I'm trying to make the world a better place." (applause, applause)

Well, we understand there's a certain nobility in that kind of selflessness and desire to give back to the world and community, but that can't supply ultimate meaning in life because "under the sun", it can't provide ultimate meaning in the time of death. BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Ecclesiastes shows us that there is a lot of ambiguity in life. There are unanswered questions. That will drive some of us crazy. "The spokesman for God calls us into this discomfort and wants us to see that God is there." - Eswine

4. **Aggravation**- the same thing just keeps happening over and over v. 4-7 and we may not even realize it.

Fiddler on the Roof. There's a song that's not meant to be sad and nihilistic, but it certainly evokes deep, deep longings and questions about meaning and reality. It goes like this: (Sung at his daughter's wedding day as he sees the bridal couple)

*Is this the little girl I carried? Is this the little boy at play?
I don't remember growing older, When did they?
When did she get to be a beauty? When did he grow to be so tall?
Wasn't it yesterday when they were small?*

*Sunrise, sunset. Sunrise, sunset Quickly fly the days
seedlings turn overnight to sunflowers blossoming even as we gaze*

The song is not supposed to be hopeless, but it evokes some deep questions about the meaning of this life, and it reminds us that this meaning cannot be supplied by this life, apart from God.

5. **ABSENCE OF SATISFACTION** v. 8-11 – continues in chap 2

Solder after 2 tours in Iraq goes to a mall after returning home. He could only stay for 5 minutes. Why? He was filled with anger at the heaps and heaps of stores and aisles and merchandise for sale. Why?

"After you've seen what the world is really like, it is hard to have patience with a mall."

The Preacher shows the same thing. As our eyes are opened to the "hebel" of real life, the things set before our eyes just don't satisfy. Even the good and beautiful things of this fallen world (Eden) have a "weariness" about them (1:8)

Rolling Stones..."I can't get no, satisfaction, and I tried, and I tried and I tried , AND I TRIED...

Never Enough – Greatest Showman
Will you share this with me?
'Cause darling without you

[Chorus:

*All the shine of a thousand spotlights
All the stars we steal from the night sky
Will never be enough
Never be enough
Towers of gold are still too little
These hands could hold the world but it'll*

Never be enough
Never be enough
For me
Never, Never
Never, Never
Never enough for me.

She is singing that to, and about a man, but it taps into a much deeper longing we have for something far bigger and more glorious.

He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end. Ecc 3:11`

Just last week we saw the launch of the SpaceX rocket FALCON HEAVY– Why? There is a basic human impulse to reach for more. This life does not satisfy because we were made for more. (Eternity with God, not necessarily Mars)

6. ALL is vanity – v.12-18

It's not just that "all is VANITY", but "ALL is vanity"

The Preacher set out to explore ALL wisdom; ALL the works under the sun resulted in ALL being vanity and striving after the wind. This a reality for believer and non-believer, but the believer does have an understanding that "under the sun" is not all there is.

"He magnified and increased wisdom more than ALL who were over Jerusalem. "

Ecclesiastes points us to the True King and Son of David. He is the one who wept over Jerusalem. He is one who is "greater than Solomon" (Matt 121:42).

Jesus teaches us not to put our hope and trust in this world. "What does it profit a man to gain the world and forfeit his soul?" (Mk 8:36)

Because Jesus is Immanuel we can know His presence in the "hebel". He can redeem our lives, even our mistakes for His ultimate glory and our own good. And God alone can satisfy our hearts. Jesus is the Bread of life for hungry hearts. He is the Living Water for thirsty souls.

Wisdom does not mean or require that we know the why and how of everything. It means that we know the WHO of everything. The one who gave His life for us.

If you know Him, then
COME TO THE TABLE.

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