

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 15TH, 2019 // ECCLESIASTES

WHAT IS ECCLESIASTES ABOUT?

- 1 of 5 O.T. books known as "wisdom literature".
- Literally means, "one who speaks to the congregation", referring to the narrator, "the Preacher".
- Recognized by some as the most misunderstood book of the Bible.
- Ecclesiastes asks the ultimate question- what is the meaning of life?

WHO WROTE ECCLESIASTES?

- "The Preacher" identifies himself as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1).
- He also speaks of his own great wisdom, incredible wealth, power, writing many proverbs, relationships with many women, and extravagant luxury.
- Most likely, "the preacher" is King Solomon- and Ecclesiastes was written near the end of his life as he reflected on the life he'd lived.

SIGNIFICANT PHRASES IN ECCLESIASTES

- "Under the sun"- used 29 times, expresses an widespread, earthly, materialist point of view that leaves God entirely out of the picture.
- "Vanity"/"Vanity of Vanities"- meaningless, transient, empty, or futile (literally, "breath" or "vapor").
- "Chasing after the wind"- a metaphor for the pursuit of things that have no abiding value.

THE WORDS OF THE PREACHER (ECCLESIASTES 1:1-2)

The "preacher" (Qoheleth) is a term that designates a man who assembles a group or congregation to teach them.

- "Son of David, king in Jerusalem" provides us with enough identifiers to conclude that this is most likely Solomon speaking to us.
- Solomon confronts us with the reality that life "under the sun" is meaningless (vs. 2).

"Vanity of vanities", "all is vanity"- the Hebrew word hevel refers to breath or vapor.

- This word is used more than 30 times in the book, and carries the connotation that life and all of its pleasures are fleeting.
- It's like when you breathe on a cold day, you see your breath and then it vanishes.
- He's saying life is meaningless, worthless, or frustrating because its frail & fleeting.

Pleasure and satisfaction are frail- right when we think everything in our life is just as it should be to bring us contentment, something happens to throw everything off.

- Pleasure and satisfaction are fleeting- it never really lasts and the things that once made us happy don't anymore and are never quite enough.
 - We look for meaning, satisfaction, & pleasure in all sorts of places under the sun.
- But Solomon says, "it's ALL meaningless"- it won't last and it won't deliver what it promises.
- Not one single aspect of our existence- and not single thing that could happen to us today- is free from being frustrated by futility.
 - Every day we encounter things that are frustrating, annoying, boring, useless, pointless, and just downright absurd. This is premise of Solomon's argument.

UNDER THE SUN (ECCLESIASTES 1:3-11)

Solomon asks us, "what is there to be gained by all the toil at which we toil under the sun"? (vs. 3)

- That phrase, "under the sun" is simply another way of saying "apart from God" or seeing life only through a materialist perspective.
- In other words, if this is all there is, why do we wear ourselves out to work like we do?
- Solomon now compares & contrasts humanity to nature to make a very unsettling point.

"A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains..."- 200 years ago, there was a generation living on this same patch of ground, and they came and went.

- In verses 4-7 Solomon looks at the things of nature and sees no real change anywhere.
- With weary monotony the sun rises and sets, over and over and over again (vs. 5).

The wind goes around in circles (vs. 6) and the water flows forever in the sea (vs. 7).

- Everything is the same as it always has been and it's the same old boring cycles year after year, generation after generation, century after century.
- Our lives reflect that same monotony- we go about our routines day after day and live out the same life seasons & experiences that others do.

"All things are full of weariness"- all of it is far more boring, monotonous, and meaningless than any of us want to admit.

- Some of us try to escape that monotony by filling our senses with what we see and hear.

- We use art, music, film, comedy, novelty, leisure, pleasure, drink, drugs, sports, sex, beauty, travel, hobbies, and trinkets to try and escape the monotony and boredom that is life.
- But the problem is, "the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing" (vs. 8).
- We're insatiable in our appetite and even if we have seen before, we want more!
 - But what we do really gain? We simply distract ourselves from the reality that is our lives.
 - There's nothing really that's new "under the sun"- "what has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done" (vs. 9).

Every generation has its technological advances and new shiny, trinkets- but nothing is "new" when you really stop and think about it.

It's just a different way to make our lives easier or distract us from the reality that we're all dying and our of our stuff will end up in a landfill someday.

- The more things change, the more they stay the same- and if it ever seems like we've found something new, it's only because we've forgotten what happened before!

"There's no remembrance of former things"- there have been 108 billion humans on this earth, and almost ALL of them are completely forgotten.

- We will most likely be forgotten too! (vs. 11)- there will be "no remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after".
- Life "under the sun" is a meaningless treadmill of monotony, boredom, and pointless distraction until we someday die and are completely forgotten.

THE GREAT RIDDLE OF LIFE (ECCLESIASTES 1:12-18)

Solomon moves from what he's observed in nature to what we learn from his experiences.

- He gives us a personal testimony that he tried everything- and nothing satisfied.
- He tells us that he, "applied his heart to seek and search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven" (vs. 13).
- He personally investigated EVERY human endeavor to find meaning apart from God.

The Bible tells us that Solomon was "greater in riches and wisdom than all the other kings of the earth" (1 Kings 10:23)- he had more wealth and power than anyone on earth.

- Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:1-13)- he had experienced all there was to experience sexually and romantically.
- Solomon wrote proverbs & songs, completed building projects, and built a fleet of ships.

And yet, he says, "I have seen EVERYTHING that is done under the sun, and behold, ALL is vanity and a striving after the wind" (vs. 14).

- Wind is impossible to capture, and it also changes its course with no sign or warning.
- Not only that, no matter how creative and persistent man's effort to have fulfillment in life apart from God, he's reminded that it is fundamentally flawed (vs. 15).

"What is crooked can't be made straight, and what is lacking can't be counted" (vs. 15)- no matter where you go, there you are.

- Our fundamental problem can't be fixed with changes of scenery, money, pleasure, success, or trinkets.
- Solomon had asked God for wisdom and received it bountifully (1 Kgs. 3), but still he couldn't solve the riddle of how find meaning apart from God.

Not only did Solomon try wisdom, he also applied his heart to know "madness & folly" (vs. 17).

- He lived the high-brow, wise, and upscale life- and he lived hard, fast, and hedonistic life.
- And still he found that BOTH lifestyles are simply a "striving after wind".
- This is significant because for all of us we think the grass is greener on the other side, and a lifestyle change is what we need to be happy.

"In much wisdom is vexation and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow" (vs. 18).

The more you open your eyes, the more you learn about life, people and the world, and the more willing you are to lean into reality and not just distractions- the more wisdom & knowledge you receive.

- And with wisdom comes the sorrow that if this is all there is, it's all meaningless.
- Why is Life this Way? (Rom. 8:20-21)

When humanity rebelled against God's design (Gen. 3), a frustrating curse was brought into the world.

- Now nothing works right, and we live in a broken world where we suffer the consequences of going our own way.
- Disease, death, poverty, evil, injustice, boredom and sadness characterize our current existence.

Fallen creation is in bondage screaming for rescue.

- There is NOTHING "under the sun" that can rescue you from this curse of futility.
- You need something or someone beyond the sun to rescue and redeem you.