

01-10-16 All Is Meaningless Without God

Ecc. 12:13

Ecclesiastes is not the most popular book in the Bible and not the most common for preaching, but we are going through the entire Bible together and this is the next book in line after Proverbs that PJ spoke about last week. Next week is Song of Songs or Song of Solomon. I can't wait to hear that sermon 😊

Ecclesiastes is also written by Solomon, son of King David, and the third king of Israel. If you remember, David has a vision of a temple built for God, but he was told it would not be him to build it, since he was a man of war. His son Solomon would be the one to build the house of God – Bethel in Jerusalem.

In your folder there is a blank page for you to take notes. On the reverse side I put the jist of this sermon for you to reflect on at home on your own. But right now, I want to give you a 2-3 minute assignment... I read this exercise online... Take that blank side and write down those things that are most important in your life. It could be your job, success, family, kids, God, friends, organization, money, things, or influence; anything you think of. Please be honest. Like don't put down God just because we're in church and you think that's the best answer. Think about it and put as many things down you can think of. We'll refer to this throughout the sermon.

In the beginning of Solomon's reign, God approached him to ask what he would ask of God. We find this in 1 Chorn. 1:7-12 – Let's look at that now...

1 Chron. 1:7-12 - That night God appeared to Solomon and said, "What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!"

⁸ Solomon replied to God, "You showed great and faithful love to David, my father, and now you have made me king in his place. ⁹ O LORD God, please continue to keep your promise to David my father, for you have made me king over a people as numerous as the dust of the earth! ¹⁰ Give me the wisdom and knowledge to lead them properly, for who could possibly govern this great people of yours?"

¹¹ God said to Solomon, "Because your greatest desire is to help your people, and you did not ask for wealth, riches, fame, or even the death of your enemies or a long life, but rather you asked for wisdom and knowledge to properly govern my people— ¹² I will certainly give you the wisdom and knowledge you requested. But I will also give you wealth, riches, and fame such as no other king has had before you or will ever have in the future!"

WOW! – That's a great gift from God and a great promise to Solomon. However, as we see from Scripture and the life memoirs of Solomon himself, he did not live up to God's standard. He was blessed, but he also was led astray because of all the blessings and availability of the good life.

My Life Application Bible intro to Ecclesiastes says this...

"The Chocolate bunny lies in the basket surrounded by green paper "grass." With Easter morning eyes wide with anticipation, the little boy carefully lifts the candy figure and bites into one of the long ears. But the sweet taste fades quickly, and the child looks again at the candy in his hand. It's hollow! Empty, futile, hollow, nothing – the words have a ring of disappointment and disillusionment. Yet this is the life experience of many. Grasping

the sweet things – possessions, experience, power, and pleasure – they find nothing inside. Life is empty, meaningless – and they sink into despair.”

This is how Solomon felt at the end of his life and reign.. His final conclusion?

Ecc. 12:13 – “Fear God and obey His commands, for this is everyone’s duty.”

He finally got it.

Ray Stedman titles Ecclesiastes “The Inspired Book of Error.” While it is accurate, as all Scripture, it is not all true. It is the only book in the Bible that reflects a human, rather than a divine, point of view. It looks at the world from a human perspective. So, it is accurate, but it is not always true.

Ecc. 1:2 – “Meaningless, meaningless! Says the Teacher (Solomon). Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” Accurate but not true! Other versions use the word “vanity.” *The Message says it this way... “Smoke, nothing but smoke. [That’s what the Quester says.] There’s nothing to anything – it’s all smoke.”*

A woman once confided in her pastor, “I must confess to you, Reverend that I struggle with a terrible sin: the sin of vanity. Every morning before I leave the house, I admire myself in the mirror for an hour.”

“My dear lady,” the minister replied, “that is not the sin of vanity you are suffering with. It is merely and excess of imagination.” (Adventuring Through the Bible, Ray Stedman, p. 279).

The book of Proverbs is a compilation of Solomon’s wise sayings over many years. The Song of Solomon is at a time of his viral years and his drifting away from God with all the wives and concubines during that time. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Guys, do know what that means? He could have a different woman every day for about 2.5 years and not repeat, if he wanted to! What that heck? Ecclesiastes is written at the end of his life where he realizes the error of his ways and what the true meaning of life should be for everyone. It is a sobering testimony to one who had it all. At least he realized it before the end.

So here’s a man who had everything you can imagine and more. Yet at the end of his life, he looked back and had this to say about it all...

As I go through these points, cross off the thing that relates to this on your list.

1:12:18 – the meaninglessness of wisdom (Solomon’s greatest asset)

I, the Teacher, was king of Israel, and I lived in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to search for understanding and to explore by wisdom everything being done under heaven. I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race. I observed everything going on under the sun, and really, it is all meaningless— like chasing the wind.

What is wrong cannot be made right.

What is missing cannot be recovered.

I said to myself, “Look, I am wiser than any of the kings who ruled in Jerusalem before me. I have greater wisdom and knowledge than any of them.” So I set out to learn everything from wisdom to madness and folly. But I learned firsthand that pursuing all this is like chasing the wind.

The greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.

Sometimes the greatest thing we want in life and even ask God for turns out to be something that takes us down or brings us disappointment overall. For Solomon it was the wisdom and knowledge that God graciously gave him at his request. If you have something related to this on your life importance list, cross it off now.

2:1-11 – the meaninglessness of pleasure

I said to myself, “Come on, let’s try pleasure. Let’s look for the ‘good things’ in life.” But I found that this, too, was meaningless. So I said, “Laughter is silly. What good does it do to seek pleasure?” After much thought, I decided to cheer myself with wine. And while still seeking wisdom, I clutched at foolishness. In this way, I tried to experience the only happiness most people find during their brief life in this world.

I also tried to find meaning by building huge homes for myself and by planting beautiful vineyards. I made gardens and parks, filling them with all kinds of fruit trees. I built reservoirs to collect the water to irrigate my many flourishing groves. I bought slaves, both men and women, and others were born into my household. I also owned large herds and flocks, more than any of the kings who had lived in Jerusalem before me. I collected great sums of silver and gold, the treasure of many kings and provinces. I hired wonderful singers, both men and women, and had many beautiful concubines. I had everything a man could desire!

Pleasure is a pretty broad term. It encompasses a multitude of desires and actions all geared to self-gratification. Solomon mentions a few things here that he indulged in that proved to be disappointments in the end. The good things in life, happiness, laughter, wine or getting a buzz on, building projects for yourself (homes, get-aways, vacations places, etc.), gardens, slaves or hired hands, wealth and money (silver and gold), singers, bands, wives and girlfriends, power to do what you want anytime you want however you want, and even hard work and rewards of doing it all yourself. So, cross any of those things from your list at this time.

2:18-26 – the meaninglessness of work

I came to hate all my hard work here on earth, for I must leave to others everything I have earned. And who can tell whether my successors will be wise or foolish? Yet they will control everything I have gained by my skill and hard work under the sun. How meaningless! So I gave up in despair, questioning the value of all my hard work in this world.

As mentioned earlier, work can be a detriment to your life. It is admirable and necessary, but where does it stack up in the overall importance of your living? Cross out any work related items on your list.

3:16-17, 4:1-4 – the meaninglessness of justice

I also noticed that under the sun there is evil in the courtroom. Yes, even the courts of law are corrupt! I said to myself, “In due season God will judge everyone, both good and bad, for all their deeds.”

Again, I observed all the oppression that takes place under the sun. I saw the tears of the oppressed, with no one to comfort them. The oppressors have great power, and their victims are helpless. So I concluded that the dead are better off than the living. But most fortunate of all are those who are not yet born. For they have not seen all the evil that is done under the sun. Then I observed that most people are motivated to success because they envy their neighbors. But this, too, is meaningless—like chasing the wind.

How do you measure justice and even success? Justice seems to be arbitrary lately. So where is true justice in the scheme of life? Does it even exist? People get away with murder and injustice, yet nothing seems to remedy this situation, no matter how spiritual we are. Evil still seems to excel. If you possibly had justice items on your list, please cross them out at this time.

4:13-16 – the meaninglessness of political power

It is better to be a poor but wise youth than an old and foolish king who refuses all advice. Such a youth could rise from poverty and succeed. He might even become king, though he has been in prison. But then everyone rushes to the side of yet another youth who replaces him. Endless crowds stand around him, but then another generation grows up and rejects him, too. So it is all meaningless—like chasing the wind.

As we have seen in our own political arena, some rise to the occasion and last for a while. Then others come up and depose them. People are up and down, in favor and out of favor. Politicians come and go from year to year. You can understand Solomon's conclusion about all this – it's all smoke, meaningless. Is your thing politics? I know many who have politics at the top of their interest agenda. Even church people can focus on political items over everything. Politics is OK, but is it paramount? Cross off anything related to politics from your list now.

5:8-20 – the meaninglessness of wealth

Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness! The more you have, the more people come to help you spend it. So what good is wealth—except perhaps to watch it slip through your fingers!

People who work hard sleep well, whether they eat little or much. But the rich seldom get a good night's sleep.

There is another serious problem I have seen under the sun. Hoarding riches harms the saver. Money is put into risky investments that turn sour, and everything is lost. In the end, there is nothing left to pass on to one's children. We all come to the end of our lives as naked and empty-handed as on the day we were born. We can't take our riches with us.

And it is a good thing to receive wealth from God and the good health to enjoy it.

You can't take it with you! That is a true statement. Work all you want, and amass all the wealth you can, but it dies with you. You can leave some to your family, but you can't take it with you. You leave empty, just as you came into this world. **LOTTO craze this week.** Think about that and cross out any items on your list that pertain to wealth and security.

6:10-12 – the meaninglessness of planning

Everything has already been decided. It was known long ago what each person would be. So there's no use arguing with God about your destiny.

The more words you speak, the less they mean. So what good are they?

In the few days of our meaningless lives, who knows how our days can best be spent? Our lives are like a shadow. Who can tell what will happen on this earth after we are gone?

Planning, my favorite. Corinne and I get into it every weekend when she asks me what my plan is. Argh! I know that if we are going to live on this earth daily, we have to have some plans, but I am not a plan it out guy. I am more of a spontaneous react guy, however, I do have a plan many times, but not as organized and discussed as it may need to be. Regardless, in the overall scheme of things, how important is a well laid out plan? You can plan all you want in the flesh, but really it's all up to God. No plan will succeed except what He ordains – in the long term. So cross off anything to do with planning.

8:8, 9:1-12 – the fact of death

8:8 - None of us can hold back our spirit from departing. None of us has the power to prevent the day of our death. There is no escaping that obligation, that dark battle. And in the face of death, wickedness will certainly not rescue the wicked.

9:1-12 - This, too, I carefully explored: Even though the actions of godly and wise people are in God's hands, no one knows whether God will show them favor. The same destiny ultimately awaits everyone, whether righteous or wicked, good or bad ceremonially clean or unclean, religious or irreligious. Good people receive the same treatment as sinners, and people who make promises to God are treated like people who don't.

Death is inevitable for all of us. No matter how you try to keep yourself healthy or fit, eventually you will die. You don't know when that may happen or how, but it will, unless Jesus returns first, but we can't count on that. It could happen by disease, or by an accident, or heart attack, or stroke, who knows but God. None of the things we just looked at can add another minute to our lives. When we die, so does all these things with us. So what's the answer to all this? That's exactly what Solomon concluded at the end of his life...

Ecc. 12:13-14 – “That's the whole story. Here now is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey His commands, for this is everyone's duty. God will judge us for everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.” (NLT)

Does “meaningless” mean the same as “bad/evil?” I don't think so. Solomon is not saying that all the things we just mentioned are bad or evil, but how important are they in the overall scheme of life according to God? Not very important, or shouldn't be. This is the point of this sermon. Some things are necessary, but how do they stack up in importance for real life?

There is really only one eternal answer to all this. **GOD**. Make him first and obey His commands and you will have meaning to life now and into the future. I hope GOD is the only line left on your list, because He is the only thing worth our effort and focus. God is Life!

“If you enthrone God in the center of your life, you will discover all that God designed you to be. Trust Him, worship Him, follow Him, love Him, and you will be able to rejoice all the days of your life.”

(Adventuring Through the Bible, Ray Stedman, p. 287)

(The Scripture references are based on a Teen devotional that I read online.)