

Wisdom From Above For Living Here Below – Part 4

ECCLESIASTES – WHAT’S THE POINT?

Explain OT Wisdom Literature

- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

Explain LIFE GRID

- DOING (external, physical life) – Proverbs, Job
- FEELING (internal, spiritual life) – Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes
- CENTER (prayer, worship) – Psalms

ECCLESIASTES – WHAT’S THE POINT?

The title Ecclesiastes comes from the Greek word “ekklesia” which in the New Testament is translated “church” or “assembly.” It carries the idea of a preacher (or debater) speaking to a group of people. In this case it is King Solomon, who speaks from his vast life experience to discuss the problems he has encountered and seek to find answers. He is actually “debating with himself,” discussing life from many viewpoints and then coming to a conclusion. Ecclesiastes was written near the end of his life.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

Solomon is partial to the word “vanity,” using it 38 times in this book. It means “emptiness, futility, vapor, that which vanishes quickly and leaves nothing behind.” From the human point of view, life does sometimes appear futile, and it is easy for us to get pessimistic. But life is not “in vain” if it is lived according to the will of God, and that is what Solomon ends up concluding in this neglected and often misunderstood book.

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 (NLT) 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 in the world. I soon discovered that God has dealt a tragic existence to the human race. Everything under the sun is meaningless, like chasing the wind. What is wrong cannot be righted. 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 worked hard to distinguish wisdom from foolishness. But now I realize that even this was like chasing the wind. For the greater my wisdom, the greater my grief. To increase knowledge only increases sorrow.

Solomon writes about life “under the sun” (29X) which indicates a human perspective rather than Heaven’s point of view. He tries to apply his own wisdom to life and comes up short, much like we do when we try to understand our internal spiritual life by external physical principles.

He tells us in the last chapter exactly why he wrote the book, to provide us with words that would prod us to good works (“goads”) and provide us with something sure to hang our lives on (“nails”). He also says that finding all of this out was exhausting (“weariness of the flesh”).

Ecclesiastes 12:8-12 Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity. And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words; and that which was written was upright, even words of truth. The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

There is no need for us to repeat Solomon’s experiments! We need to just accept his conclusions and avoid the heartache and pain that must be endured when you experiment in the laboratory of life. These experiments are costly and one of them could prove spiritually fatal!

Mark 8:36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

OUTLINE:

Chapters 1-2	Solomon’s Initial Reactions
Chapters 3-10	Solomon’s Deeper Observations
Chapters 11-12	Solomon’s Final Conclusions

SOLOMON’S INITIAL REACTIONS (1-2)

Life is just a pointless cycle

- Solomon the scientist tells us that the world is a closed **system**;
- Solomon the historian tells us that life is a closed **book**;
- Solomon the philosopher tells us that life is a closed **cycle**. Everything around us is predictable and pretty much unchangeable.
- We get dissatisfied and long for things that are “new,” but they are really just temporary distractions – they ultimately bring weariness
- Sometimes our spiritual life feels the same!

Pleasure and wealth do not satisfy

- Solomon had the means and the authority to do just about anything his heart desired, so he decided to examine two common experiences of life, enjoyment and employment.
- He found if we live only for pleasure, **enjoyment decreases unless the intensity of pleasure increases**. Then you reach a point of diminishing returns where there is no enjoyment, only bondage. Why? Because pleasure appeals only to part of a human being.
- He also found that if we live only for accomplishments we also come up empty. Overachievers are often people who are trying to escape themselves and their pain by becoming workaholics – vanity!

SOLOMON'S DEEPER OBSERVATIONS (3-10)

Solomon was too wise to let his own arguments and first impressions go unchallenged, so in the next eight chapters, he reflects on his initial reactions in more detail, honestly facing the injustices of life that make us ask “Why?” He begins to take a balanced view of life by including God’s eternal perspective. He doesn’t recommend blind optimism, depressing pessimism, or critical cynicism ... he recommends “spiritual realism.” Here are some of his conclusions:

LOOK UP – GOD IS IN CONTROL

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

LOOK WITHIN – WE ARE ETERNAL CREATURES

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

LOOK AHEAD – DEATH IS UNAVOIDABLE

Ecclesiastes 5:18-20 (MES) After looking at the way things are on this earth, here's what I've decided is the best way to live: Take care of yourself, have a good time, and make the most of whatever job you have for as long as God gives you life. And that's about it. That's the human lot. Yes, we should make the most of what God gives, both the bounty and the capacity to enjoy it, accepting what's given and delighting in the work. It's God's gift! God deals out joy in the present, the now. It's useless to brood over how long we might live.

LOOK AROUND – LIFE IS UNPREDICTABLE

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 (CEV) Here is something else I have learned: The fastest runners and the greatest heroes don't always win races and battles. Wisdom, intelligence, and skill don't always make you healthy, rich, or popular. We each have our share of bad luck. None of us know when we might fall victim to a sudden disaster and find ourselves like fish in a net or birds in a trap.

1 Peter 1:7 (NLT) These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

SOLOMON'S FINAL CONCLUSIONS (11-12)

What's the point? That was the question raised when Solomon began the book of Ecclesiastes. When he first began experimenting, he came to the conclusion that “life is not worth living.”

But being a wise man, Solomon brought God into the picture – and what a difference it made! By the end of the book, Solomon has come full circle. He gives us four pictures of life, along with a practical admonition for each one ...

1. LIFE IS AN ADVENTURE – LIVE BY FAITH

Ecclesiastes 11:4-6 (NLT) If you wait for perfect conditions, you will never get anything done. God's ways are as hard to discern as the pathways of the wind, and as mysterious as a tiny baby being formed in a mother's womb. Be sure to stay busy and plant a variety of crops, for you never know which will grow—perhaps they all will.

2. LIFE IS A GIFT – ENJOY IT

Ecclesiastes 11:8 (MES) Even if you live a long time, don't take a single day for granted. Take delight in each light-filled hour, Remembering that there will also be many dark days And that most of what comes your way is smoke.

3. LIFE IS A SCHOOL – LEARN YOUR LESSONS

Ecclesiastes 12:11 (MES) The words of the wise prod us to live well. They're like nails hammered home, holding life together. They are given by God, the one Shepherd.

2 Timothy 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine (**what to believe**), for reproof (**what not to believe**), for correction (**how not to behave**), for instruction in righteousness (**how to behave**):

4. LIFE IS A STEWARDSHIP – PUT GOD FIRST

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (TEV) After all this, there is only one thing to say: Have reverence for God, and obey his commands, because this is all that we were created for.

1 Corinthians 15:58 (MES) With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.

Every year at the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jewish people read the book of Ecclesiastes. Why? Because Tabernacles is their great time of thanksgiving and rejoicing for God's abundant provision of their needs **while they were wandering in the wilderness!**

Philippians 4:11-13 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.