

Ecclesiastes 1-2 The most out of life

Good morning and thank you for joining us! We're kicking off our study in the book of Ecclesiastes, so would you please turn to Ecc chapter 1?

Now you might be thinking, Ecclesiastes, that's a strange name for a Bible book. Timothy I get, it was addressed to someone named Timothy, Luke I get, but what in the world does the word Ecclesiastes mean?

SHOW SLIDE Well you've probably heard that in Greek, the church is called the Ecc-less-e-a, the called out ones.

SHOW SLIDE Ecclesiastes, the preacher, is the one who calls.
CLOSE SLIDE

And we saw in 2 Timothy that preacher simply means the one who is making a proclamation.

Now as we do whenever we begin a new book of the bible, we need to take a few minutes and go through a bit of an introduction to help make sure we're understanding the context of this book.

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes is the son of King David, his name was Solomon.

So remember Israel's history of kings **SHOW SLIDE**
1st King-King Saul

2nd King-King David

3rd King-David's son Solomon

4th King-was Solomon's son named Rehoboam, who immediately divides the nation of Israel into Israel and Judah. A man named Jeroboam becomes king over the 10 tribes of Northern Israel, Solomons son Rehoboam is then king over southern kingdom of Judah which includes Jerusalem **CLOSE SLIDE**

So this was written when solomon was king, about 930 BC. But 40 years before, when Solomon first became king, he spoke this incredible prayer **1 Kings 3 9 Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?"**

10 The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you.

Solomon started off as a great king who followed the Lord with all his heart. But what we're about to study over the next several Sundays is an aged Solomon, who at the end of his life is absolutely miserable. What we're about to study, is a letter full of exasperation and despair.

So how does a man who started off so strong by loving God, he's the wisest man, the richest man in all of history, how does he write this letter of despair? We're about to find out!

SHOW BACKGROUND SLIDE I'm calling this series "Getting the most out of life", because that's what Ecclesiastes is all about.

We're gonna study chapters 1-2, and the title of this mornings message is BEYOND THE SUN

Let's pray.

We know that as the kingdom of Israel grew, Solomon became so wealthy that silver was accounted as rocks in his day. **2 Chron 9:27 The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland.**

Solomon wasn't fighting wars, so he's building buildings. He's making shields of gold. He imported ivory and made ivory thrones and then overload the ivory thrones with gold.

The amount of wealth and opulence that we see in the life of this man at this point in time is really unimaginable. Think about your wildest dream, what would cost the most money, and Solomon had 10 of em.

Solomon was the guy who had everything, and in one sense ended up with nothing, because his heart wasn't right with God.

1-2

1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2 “Vanity[fn] of vanities,” says the Preacher;
“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”

Well how’s that for an encouraging opening line? You know you can tell right from the beginning this is one exasperated king.

Now as we go through these 12 chapters, we’re gonna see this word vanity 38 times!

SHOW SLIDE That word vanity means lacking real substance, lacking real value. There’s no lasting worth or significance. It’s like a breath that disappears on a chilly morning. **CLOSE SLIDE**

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

We’re gonna have that word profit 10 times through these 12 chapters. What profit means what advantage, what good is it?

SHOW SLIDE That word labor is used 23 times, it means working to the point of exhaustion. **CLOSE SLIDE**

Finally, **SHOW SLIDE** the phrase under the sun is used 29 times through the book. His whole context is under the sun. And of course, what he’s missing is what’s over the sun in heaven.

CLOSE SLIDE

At this point in his life Solomon’s entire focus is on the horizontal of life, not on the vertical. And we want to listen to him as he tells

us these things because he delved deeper into all of this than anyone in history.

What we're gonna see through all of this is all the things that Solomon gave his energy, his intellect too, it left him empty. Here are his observations.

4 One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. It's been said that life is a parade of coffins and cradles. One generation's going, one generation's coming.

It was 25 years ago I watched my mom die in my dad's arms in our living room. And I called the authorities, and I left. I remember going to the college town just sitting there, watching everyone else's life just carry on. My world was falling apart, and it didn't affect them. It changed how I looked at death, and life. The reality is life goes on.

Now Solomon's gonna observe some things about nature and its routines. He's speaking of the monotony of life.

5-6

**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.**

SHOW PIC Long before satellite photography, Solomon understood that there are weather patterns on the face of the planet. And he says you know what, they're monotonous too.

SHOW PIC We see this today right, global warming, global cooling. El Nino, La Nina, El Nino, La Nina. Round and round we go. **CLOSE PIC**

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. There's a hydrological system, and it just keeps going and going.

And look Solomon is doing something very important here for us to understand.

It's important to just sit and admire nature sometimes, and if you really contemplate it, you're speechless.

I never ponder nature and think 'oh this evolution thing is so cool.' I sit there and say, God, you blow my mind. I love to hear the birds sing. I love to see the clouds. I love to see the shapes. I'm amazed.

When you lose that you've lost something critically important. You've lost the wonderment of God.

Romans 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

Here's a guy saying I understand all that stuff in nature and creation, I understand it so much about it that it becomes monotonous.

Solomon has lost touch with His creator.

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

Our eyes aren't ever satisfied with seeing are they? And all this stuff that's paraded in front of us, none of it's gonna satisfy.

Solomon in later chapters is gonna say I got it all. I went out and bought at least one of everything that you've ever seen. And the eye is never satisfied, it's never fulfilled.

Now there's a reason why our eyes are never satisfied. It's because we haven't realized yet what our eyeballs are for! When we draw our last breath and the first thing we see is Jesus, we'll know what our eyeballs are for.

Until then, there's no satisfaction on this earth for our eyes or ears
9-10

9 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. **SHOW PIC** I walked into Meijer last week and they had a whole section of shirts that said 90's style. I'm like 90's style? Then I realized that from today to 1995, is the same distance in time from when I was in HS in 95 to 1965. I about staggered. **CLOSE PIC**

Look here's Solomons problem-it's in verse 9, cause he's only looking under the sun 29 times through the book.

He's focused on under the sun. But we know over the sun, in heaven is the Son of God, who gives us a new birth, we're a new creation in Christ.

And think about what we know that Solomon didn't know. We know who the messiah is-its Jesus. We know there's gonna be a new heaven and a new earth. There's a new city, Holy Jerusalem coming down out of heaven.

There's an awful lot that's new coming in the future that Solomon didn't know about, that you and I know about. Isn't that incredible!!

He was the wisest man that ever lived, and we know some things that he didn't.

I didn't say we're wiser than him. I'm just saying we got some info he doesn't.

Here's why that matters-the knowledge we have about our future with Christ should affect how we live on this earth.

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. In a hundred years, the household
names of today will long be forgotten
12-13

12 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. As we go along
Solomon's going to say he tried everything to indulge himself. He
had more money than we could ever dream of. He had had more
women than you ever dreamed of-700 wives, 300 concubines.
And none of it satisfied him.
14-15

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, Pause here. Now
you and I know that's not true because we were crooked and
have been made straight by Jesus Christ.
And what is lacking cannot be numbered.

He's saying there's so many things wrong, you can't count them. We see this don't we? There's just so many things wrong in this fallen world you can't track all of it.

16-17

16 I communed with my heart, (that's the problem) 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. How easy is it to catch a handful of wind? Impossible right? So it is with trying to find fulfillment apart from walking with Christ.

18 For in much wisdom is much grief,
And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. This is important for us to understand because we live in the information age.

Imagine watching the news and not having a New Testament, not knowing Jesus Christ, not having the hope of heaven. Imagine watching and understanding what was going on in the world with no hope beyond this world. Yeah it'd be a big bummer!

That's the predicament that Solomon was in, and what non believers today are facing. No wonder people are losing their minds.

Chapter 2

1 I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also was vanity.

Solomon says, ok i’m gonna be a party animal, I’m gonna see what that does.

This is the guy who had resources that no one has ever had. He indulged himself in ways no one has ever had. And he's saying to us, don't go there. It ain't there. He’s plumbed the depths of all of those things and it's not satisfying.

2-3

2 I said of laughter—“Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?” 3 I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives.

Solomon was searching on the horizontal for things to satisfy his heart, and it left him empty.

And now, from verse 4 to verse 11, we see that Solomon has an eye problem here. As he goes into these verses, he says I, I, I 32 times

Remember, the more we focus upon ourselves, the more miserable we will become.

4-11

4 I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. 5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and I

planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6 I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.

7 I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments^[fn] of all kinds.

9 So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

10 Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them.
I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,
For my heart rejoiced in all my labor;
And this was my reward from all my labor.

11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done
And on the labor in which I had toiled;
And indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind.
There was no profit under the sun. What's the issue? He's trying to find contentment on the horizontal, on things of this world.

12 Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly;
For what can the man do who succeeds the king?—
Only what he has already done. The guy who succeeds the king really isn't going to do anything new that hasn't been done before.

13-17

13 Then I saw that wisdom excels folly
As light excels darkness.

14 The wise man's eyes are in his head,
But the fool walks in darkness.
Yet I myself perceived
That the same event happens to them all.

15 So I said in my heart,
"As it happens to the fool,
It also happens to me,
And why was I then more wise?"
Then I said in my heart,
"This also is vanity."

16 For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool
forever,
Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come.
And how does a wise man die?
As the fool!

17 Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under
the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the
wind.

Solomon indulged himself in every way imaginable. He had
everything this life has to offer, and look what v 17 says-I hated
life. None of it really satisfies.

18 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun,
because I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

You know what you leave behind when you leave this earth?
Everything!

19 And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity. When Solomons son Rehoboam takes over to be king, in 1 week he divided the Kingdom in two.

20-23

20 Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. 21 For there is a man whose labor is with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. 22 For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? 23 For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. Solomon is struggling so badly here thinking of all that he invented, all his ideas, will just be passed on to the next guy who didn't even work for it.

But for the Christian, we know the truth of **Colossians 3:23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for^[fn] you serve the Lord Christ.**

But this life is not the end of the story, praise God!!

24 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I?^[fn] Notice the warning here. So often people become obsessed with attaining things, with getting more. Solomon says in all my wisdom I realize I should've given God thanks for the simple pleasures in life.

V26 is the first of six conclusions he comes to as we go through this book.

26 For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Our Constitution tells us we are guaranteed the right to pursue happiness. Yet as wonderful as that sounds politically, its really disastrous. Because happiness will never be found by those who pursue it.

SHOW PIC Happiness is like an elusive butterfly-the more you chase it, the quicker it flies away. **CLOSE PIC**

The only way to find real joy, real contentment, is to surrender.

John 12 25 He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.

We're either serving ourselves, which leads to misery, or serving God, which leads to eternal life!