

Ecclesiastes 3-4 “Eternal Purpose”

Good morning and thank you for joining us! Would you please turn in your Bibles to Ecclesiastes 3? Remember, Solomon, the wisest, richest man in all the world wrote this book.

And you would think that a book written by the wisest, richest man that ever lived would be **SHOW PIC** full of joy and gladness, and lessons on how you too can be wise and rich. **CLOSE PIC**

But this book strikes an entirely different tone. Ecclesiastes is full of despair and anguish. The words of this book are dripping with frustration.

And do you remember why? Even though Solomon started off as a good king, later on in life his heart became distracted, and he took his eyes off the Lord.

Solomon was the man who had everything in the world you could ever dream of, every wish, every fantasy fulfilled. Solomon had everything, yet ended up with nothing, because his focus was in the wrong place.

Of course Solomon isn't the only person in history to gain the wealth of the world, but be miserable

SHOW PIC John D Rockefeller, 100 years ago at the end of his life was making into his bank account \$1,000,000 a week. That

\$1m 100 years ago today would be \$38m. That was every week.

CLOSE PIC

And at the end of his life, Rockefeller was distraught, he was under 100 lbs and he couldn't eat.

SHOW PIC You read about Howard Hughes, who owned most of the real estate in Vegas, once the world's richest man. And the further on he went in life, with all his money he became bigoted and a proponent of segregation. He tried to control senators and congressmen and legislation. And Hughes ended up with his fingernails growing around in his hands and needles broke off in his arms and afraid of germs. **CLOSE PIC**

Now it's important to know that being financially rich isn't a sin. Joseph was rich. Abraham was rich, David was rich. The issue, the sin comes in when we place our trust and faith and focus in those riches. **Matthew 6 19 "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

We're gonna study chapters 3 and 4, and the title of this mornings message is Eternal Purpose
Let's pray

When I read Ecclesiastes, there's always 2 songs that come to my mind

SHOW PIC 1st is the Rolling Stones-"I can't get no satisfaction"
That song describes much of Ecclesiastes doesn't it? **CLOSE PIC**

SHOW PIC The other song I always think of is a legend. In fact, the song holds the record of being the number 1 hit with the oldest lyrics. The song was released in 1959, but the lyrics were written about 3,000 years before that. **CLOSE PIC**

In fact that song is almost verbatim of this first part of Ecclesiastes
3. **PLAY CLIP FROM :11 TO :30**

Let's dig in

**1 To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:** They say that time is a great healer, but time is a terrible beautician. And we're about to see the poetry in this list describing the different seasons and facets of life.

And yeah the song may be catchy, but these words also cast a dark shadow because they remind us of the inevitability of trouble and difficulty in life.

In verses 2-8 it's a poem. The word "time" appears 28 times in these seven verses, in 14 pairs of opposites, evidently in order to cover the whole range of human life

2-8

2 A time to be born,

And a time to die;
A time to plant,
And a time to pluck what is planted;
3 A time to kill,
And a time to heal;
A time to break down,
And a time to build up;
4 A time to weep,
And a time to laugh;
A time to mourn,
And a time to dance;
5 A time to cast away stones,
And a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace,
And a time to refrain from embracing;
6 A time to gain,
And a time to lose;
A time to keep,
And a time to throw away;
7 A time to tear,
And a time to sew;
A time to keep silence,
And a time to speak;
8 A time to love,
And a time to hate;
8 A time of war,
And a time of peace.

Solomon is describing the monotony of life, it just goes round and round. It seems like one thing happens and it gets canceled out by the opposite thing.

And if you were here last time in our study, remember the whole issue that Solomon is wrestling with is he's looking at everything in the natural, on the horizontal, everything under the sun.

And when he contemplates life, there's war, there's peace, there's planting, there's sowing, there's birth, there's death. And you can sense his frustration. He's saying the net result of it is that each thing just seems to cancel out the other.

Solomon is being very fatalistic here and very different from his father king David. It was David who said **Psalm 139:16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.**

David had his eyes on heaven-over the sun. Solomon's life was filled with angst and frustration because he was fixated on what's under the sun.

9-11

9 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? 10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

God has set eternity, notice not in our intellect, but in our hearts. There's something very deep, very visceral, in every human being about eternity.

And that's going to be very important to remember as we go on in this chapter because he's going to say, without that longing of eternity in our hearts, there's no difference between a man and a beast.

And it's true. Think about it, **SHOW PIC** cows are not walking around the field being like 'there must be MOOOre to life than this? The cows aren't saying what's this all about? Eat grass and end up as a burger? Cow's aren't thinking that. **CLOSE PIC**

But every person born is born with eternity in their heart. And people get frustrated because they have a sense of eternity and it eats at them, until they get that eternity in it's proper context- eternity with God through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Eternity is in our hearts because we are made in the image of an eternal God. And we can't satisfy the eternal with anything temporal

12-13

12 I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives, 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor—it is the gift of God. In light of God's making everything beautiful in His time, and in light of God's gift of eternity in our hearts, then it's wise to receive the good things of this life, and to receive them as the gift of God.

God gives us richly all things to enjoy, but God also warns us not to trust in uncertain riches. 1 Tim 6 17 Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

14 I know that whatever God does,
It shall be forever.

Nothing can be added to it,
And nothing taken from it.

God does it, that men should fear before Him. Here Solomon escapes, for a brief moment from his under the sun thinking. He declares that God is eternal,

His ways are not our ways. Isaiah 55:8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts,

Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.

9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.

So why do we get so stuck sometimes on the unanswerable things in this life?

I'm sure everyone in this room has faced difficult questions that have no answer. We get to the point-'God this makes no sense, what are you doing, why would You allow this?'

I love the old adage-what's over my head, is still under God's feet.

15 That which is has already been,
And what is to be has already been;
And God requires an account of what is past.

One of the problems we have in this life is the injustice that we are surrounded by. But Solomon believed that God would eventually balance the scales of justice.

Look one day this is all gonna come to pass. There are things that just don't make sense.

But the day is coming Revelation 21 1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John,[fn] saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

5 Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me,[fn] “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

I can’t wait for that day when He makes all things new. But until that day, we have to keep a heavenly perspective as we live out our lives.

But that’s not what Solomon does. Solomon gets his focus in the wrong spot, it’s back under the sun.

16 Moreover I saw under the sun: Pause here. This happens all the time. People will get a spiritual awakening, start thinking about God, the things of God. Then their focus drops on the things of the world.

It takes discipline and commitment to keep our eyes on the Lord.
16-18

16 Moreover I saw under the sun:
In the place of judgment,
Wickedness was there;
And in the place of righteousness,
Iniquity was there.

17 I said in my heart,

**“God shall judge the righteous and the wicked,
For there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.”**

18 I said in my heart, “Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals.” This describes one of the unintended dire consequences of teaching evolution in school. **SHOW PIC** Evolution teaches kids you got here by mistake. You ain't staying long, and there's really no purpose to your life. **CLOSE PIC**

So since you came from animals, you're like an animal, which means just like animals you can act however you want to act. Sexually, morally.

That's the message of evolution-Why shouldn't you do whatever you want to do if you're just like every other animal?

The reality is that you are a divine creation by almighty God. God has a purpose for your life. God loves you, and your life is significant. Eternity will tell the full story of your life's impact. **Eph 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.**

So don't ever think you don't matter-you do!
19-21

19 For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust. Hows that for encouraging right? He's saying man our

lives are just like that of animals, we live, we die and return to dust.

And that's true from a physical body perspective, but of course the bible tells **2 Cor 5 7 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.**

21 Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?^[fn] Solomon acknowledges yes our spirit is different from that of the animal kingdom. But ultimately our physical bodies end up in dust

22 So I perceived that nothing is better than that a man should rejoice in his own works, for that is his heritage. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him? Here's what's incredible. Here's the wisest, richest man to ever live, and you and I know more about the Savior than Solomon knew.

We know there's something better than just staring at our selves and our accomplishments. The days coming where we're gonna see the Lord. **1 Corinthians 13 12 For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.**

Chapter 4

1 Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: he's back to under the sun again

And look! The tears of the oppressed,

But they have no comforter—

On the side of their oppressors there is power,

But they have no comforter. This is true today, all you have to do is turn on the news. You see those being oppressed who have no comforter. We see those doing the oppression gaining more and more power. And it's frustrating right?

Now it gets dark...

2-3

2 Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead,

More than the living who are still alive.

3 Yet, better than both is he who has never existed,

Who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun. We've met people like this haven't we, hey we even may have been like this at times in our lives! Just watch the news for 2 hours every day and you'll be thinking the same thing!

4-6

4 Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is envied by his neighbor. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

5 The fool folds his hands

And consumes his own flesh. (destroys himself)

6 Better a handful with quietness

Than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.

It's better to sit somewhere quiet without a whole lot, than to have everything you thought you wanted and be miserable.

Now in the next several verses he's gonna say what good is it to have success if you can't pass it on?

7-8

7 Then I returned, and I saw vanity under the sun:

8 There is one alone, without companion:

He has neither son nor brother.

Yet there is no end to all his labors,

Nor is his eye satisfied with riches.

But he never asks,

“For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?”

This also is vanity and a grave misfortune. Solomon thought of a man alone, without family or close friends. The guy dedicates his life to hard work, but has no one to leave it to.

So he's left alone to grind out a living. None of it satisfies.

Look, one of God's great gifts in helping us deal with problems of oppression, poverty, loneliness, and injustice is the company of others.

9 Two are better than one,

Because they have a good reward for their labor. In a good partnership, two can accomplish more than each one individually. The sum will be greater than the parts.

10 For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.

But woe to him who is alone when he falls,

For he has no one to help him up. Friendship and fellowship are important, because together we can help each other in difficult times. But if you're alone, it's hard to get the help you need.

Solomon understood that everybody needs help, and it's a blessing both to give and to receive help.

11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm;
But how can one be warm alone? Now remember, here's a guy who was addicted to women.

1 Kings 11 1 But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites— 2 from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. 3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David.

He had 1,000 woman and still wasn't satisfied.

12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him.

And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. [SHOW PIC](#) This verse is often used in wedding ceremonies, the reference being to a rope made of three pieces wound together. [CLOSE PIC](#)

If two pieces of rope were used, under stress and strain they would unravel and split apart-like many marriages today. But if the rope-maker wanted to make a lasting rope, he would wind a third cord in the middle to strengthen the two outer cords.

The center cord in marriage of course is to be the Lord Jesus. And it's a wonderful way to express Christian marriage.

But in the context of this passage, Solomon isn't saying, "Make Jesus the center of your relationship,"

Even in the midst of a thousand wives and concubines, Solomon felt alone. It's vanity. It's empty. And Solomon knew it.

13-14

13 Better a poor and wise youth
Than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more.
14 For he comes out of prison to be king,
Although he was born poor in his kingdom. Who is Solomon
talking about? Himself.

When he was young he sought after God. Now he's become the most powerful, potent king in the known world and he knows he's foolish. What a tragedy-to come to the end of life feeling like a sad, sorry old king

15-16

15 I saw all the living who walk under the sun;
They were with the second youth who stands in his place.

16 There was no end of all the people over whom he was made king;

Yet those who come afterward will not rejoice in him.

Surely this also is vanity and grasping for the wind. Solomon is saying I see the new guy, the new celebrity come on the scene, the one everyone is talking about-just like they used to talk about me. But I know he's going to get old and pass away. What's the point?

Encouraging book right?

For all of the vanities described in the Book of Ecclesiastes, the answer is Christ.

God has placed the desire for eternity in our hearts. And God has provided the Way to eternal life through Christ **John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.**

Look these descriptions that Solomon gives here shouldn't mark our lives at all. Because we know there's something and someone greater-our living God who we have a real personal relationship with.

Ecclesiastes offers every Christian the opportunity to understand the emptiness and despair that those who do not know God grapple with.

Those who do not have a saving faith in Christ are faced with a life that will ultimately end and become irrelevant. If there is no salvation, and no God, then not only is there no point to life, but no purpose or direction to it, either.

The phrase “under the sun,” apart from God, is frustrating, cruel, unfair, brief, and “utterly meaningless.”