

Ecclesiastes Series – Part One
The Search for Meaning in Life
Pastor Lester Zimmerman

This morning we begin a three part series on one of the more challenging Old Testament books – the book of Ecclesiastes.

This book written by King Solomon is about his quest to find meaning in life.

He takes us on a journey that seems kind of depressing at times, but he ends with the answer to the question many are asking about the meaning of life.

- **It end with a message of hope and a call to a God centered life.**

Solomon refers to himself as the “**teacher**”. He wants to teach us about the things he learned about life.

I think Ecclesiastes is a good commentary of our time as well. Just like Solomon, many people are trying to find purpose and meaning by pursuing different things.

- **But Solomon says it is all meaningless. It is all empty.**

If I would put it in my words as I look around, I would say it all seems crazy like the world has gone mad. People are throwing off restraint and pursuing their pleasures with abandonment **and yet people don’t seem happy**.

- Depression and suicide is at an all-time high.

The best way to understand this book is to understand that Solomon is writing this from the perspective of what it is like trying to find meaning in life without God.

Without God this world looks pretty dark and empty. Trying to understand life simply with **human reasoning** will make you a cynic at best and atheist at worst.

This book is very instructive as King Solomon takes us on a journey of what life looks like from a simply **humanistic perspective**. But hang in there, throughout the book Solomon keeps bringing us back to a **God perspective**.

- A perspective that we will want to use to guide our lives.

Solomon was considered the wealthiest, best educated, most powerful, wisest man of his day. In other words, he is saying listen to me. **I had it all, and tried it all**.

He is real blunt about what he has learned about trying to find happiness and meaning by pursuing things. Right out of the gate he hits us head on.

**1:2 “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.
“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”**

Life without God as the center is empty and devoid of real meaning.

Later in the book he states that God has “set eternity in our hearts”. In other words, there is a God yearning in the heart of each person that only a relationship with Jesus can satisfy. There is a deep longing in the soul of humanity.

So, in this book he takes us step by step through the endless pursuits of man that they think will bring lasting happiness and meaning to their lives. Let me highlight a few of the things he mentions.

**1. The pursuit of education and wisdom is good but will not satisfy.
1:12-18**

Listen to what he says:

1:12-14 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

He said the more he tried to understand the more it felt like he was chasing after the wind. He was not speaking against getting a good education, but he was saying the more you learn the more you realize there are so many things you don't know.

There are some things about life you simply cannot fathom through philosophy and much learning. **You need to view life through the lens of creator God and his sovereignty for life to make sense.**

2. The pursuit of pleasure and wealth will leave you empty. 2:1-11

We all struggle at times with the “If Only Disease”. If only I was smarter, better looking, married, not married, had a better car, bigger house, different parents, dream job, perfect health, retired, and a lot more money - **than I would be happy and fulfilled**.

But money won't buy happiness, says a group of economists and psychologists. It's just an illusion that wealth brings happiness.

They state: People always think that more money will make them happier,” But the truth is, once you have a roof over your head and your basic needs covered, it doesn’t do much to fulfill you.

- Studies show increases in income have a relatively brief effect on life satisfaction. People quickly get used to all the new stuff their money can buy.

Studies show that the wealthier people are, the more intense negative emotions they experience. **Wealth may make it harder for you to appreciate simple pleasures.**

- When you start making more money, you spend more time making money -- and have less leisure time -- than you did before.

Faith and social relationships are the key to true happiness, so if you’re going to invest in something, make it God and the people in your life.

Solomon lays to rest **the great lie** that these things in themselves bring happiness. There may be temporary pleasure in these things but in the end, it leaves you with an even greater emptiness. You end up chasing the wind.

- Solomon received 25 Tons of gold annually [\$1.8 billion]
- He had twelve thousand cavalry horses – this was a huge army.
- 700 wives and 300 live in mistresses

He had it all and tried it all and he lays it all on the line for us to see the emptiness of it all. It did not bring the joy and meaning to his life that he was looking for.

2:1-11 I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. “Laughter,” I said, “is madness. And what does pleasure accomplish?” I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was good for people to do under the heavens during the few days of their lives.

I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man’s heart. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me.

**I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
I refused my heart no pleasure.
My heart took delight in all my labor,
and this was the reward for all my toil.
Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done
and what I had toiled to achieve,
everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind;
nothing was gained under the sun.**

Solomon denied himself nothing. Every pleasure his eyes saw, or he could imagine, he acquired. **He had it all and yet he was miserable and empty.**

We find these same truths repeated in the New Testament.

1 John 2:15-17

Do not love this world nor the things it offers you, for when you love the world, you do not have the love of the Father in you. For the world offers only a craving for physical pleasure, a craving for everything we see, and pride in our achievements and possessions. These are not from the Father, but are from this world. And this world is fading away, along with everything that people crave. But anyone who does what pleases God will live forever. NLT

Only a life build around a deep faith in God satisfies and has eternal rewards.

3. God wants us to find satisfaction in our work, but not be ruled by it. 2:17-26

We put a lot of value on a good work ethic but an overemphasis on work where we think about it night and day becomes unhealthy and meaningless after a while.

2:22-23 What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless.

Solomon bemoans the fact we are going to end up leaving it all to someone else who may spend it foolishly.

But as Christ followers we live with eternity in our hearts and we store up our riches in heaven.

Conclusion:

At the end of his depressing talk about how all this is meaningless; Solomon again brings us back to God. **When God is directing our lives, life takes on meaning and purpose.**

When we live for ourselves the earthly things do not satisfy very long. But Jesus teaches us how to live for others and to have hope for tomorrow.

Solomon encourages us to honor God and enjoy his blessings in our lives.

2:24-25 A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

God does want us to enjoy our lives and the work of our hands. It is not all meaningless after all.