

Reality Check – The Meaning of Life

2/6/22

Ecclesiastes 1

Sunday AM

Have you ever heard of **Lawn Chair Larry**? On July 2, 1982, Larry Walters, a regional truck driver, seeking to fulfill his childhood dream of flying, took a 45-min. maiden flight into the air over LA in a homemade airship made of an ordinary nylon lawn chair and over 40 helium-filled weather balloons. Satisfied his make-shift aircraft would be able to get into the air, Larry packed a lunch to go along w/ his loaded pellet gun he thought would assist him in his descent back to earth. Little did he know that His plan to float up to some 30 ft and hover for a few hours would turn into the adventure of a lifetime. For when he cut the cord that anchored his chair to his jeep, Larry didn't lazily float up to 30 ft; instead, he streaked into the LA sky as if shot out of a cannon up to some 16k ft. Terrified and cold, Larry didn't know what to do. So, he drifted for several hrs until he found himself in the primary glide path of the Long Beach Airport. Oddly enough, his adventure might've gone unnoticed had it not been for the United pilot who spotted him and radioed the tower saying – Long Beach tower, you're not going to believe this, but I just passed a man flying in a lawn chair w/ a gun in his hands. Ultimately, Larry did return to earth w/ a story to tell – and likely, a need for a change of pants. Later he was asked – why? He said, "Well... a guy just can't sit around."

What Larry needed (and got) was a **reality check**!

**reality check** – is the process of comparing your ideas, opinions, and perceptions of a situation to the actual facts/reality of the situation so that you **see the truth**.

Just a cursory look into our world, and how people live and think, reveals our great need for a **reality check**.

**Not surprisingly** God has given us a book in the Bible that was intended to give us a reality check? It's the book of **Ecclesiastes** penned by King Solomon. It's a book about the reality of life **w/ God** – and **w/out God**.

Ecclesiastes is found in what is known as the poetic section of the OT along w/ Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon. Yet these books are more than poetic – they're **philosophic** as Job *speaks to the nature of evil*; Psalms *speaks to the nature of God in a fallen world*. Proverbs is concerned w/ *truth/morality*; and the Song of Solomon *speaks to love/passion*.

Also included in this section is **Ecclesiastes**. It's a book inspired by God that asks 32 rhetorical questions to teach us how to live correctly down here **under the sun** in a fallen world that seldom cooperate w/ us.

The key to appreciating this book is understanding this phrase – **under the sun** (occurs 29x). This phrase isn't referring to eternity/eternal rewards, but **to life here on earth where we experience the fallenness of man and the wages of sin** – where good things can happen to bad people and bad things can happen to God's people.

Its life lived from the perspective that if this world is all there is – **then we're all in trouble**. So, Solomon, after searching the world over for meaning/purpose, offered one grand conclusion – *you can try everything this world has to offer seeking to find satisfaction and fulfillment, but it's all meaningless vanity b/c life only works w/ God in it at the center of your life*.

**In fact**, although this book appears negative/complex on the surface, it's actually an **OT Gospel tract** where God seeks to help us to understand ONE essential truth – *life down here w/out God is absolutely meaningless, but w/ God – it's more than meaningful*. Key to this discovery is in how we approach **life under the sun**.

- **FOOLISH** – *who neglect to think – and live as if God doesn't exist – as in the fool has said in his heart there is no God*. These are people who go thru life blind to the realities/truths of God trusting in themselves and their own abilities/ingenuity.
- **UNWISE** – *who think – but come to worldly a conclusion that leads them to willingly ignore God*. These are people who acknowledge God exists, yet they consciously choose to live by the ideologies of this world for personal gain/satisfaction.
- **SIMPLE** – *who think/respond biblically yet they're not thoughtful about it*. These are people who are mindful of God, yet settle for a cultural religious experience so they can remain in control of their lives enabled to live as they desire/decide by flesh.
- **WISE** – *who think/act biblically w/ intentional faith*. These are people who know God and who choose to live in alignment w/ His Word and under the influence of the H.S. trusting God to guide their steps as they seek to know and live His truth.

**WTM** – let's jump into Ecclesiastes to glean some insight into how to live w/ God under the sun.

*The words of the Preacher, son of David, king over Jerusalem: "Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." What do people gain from their labor at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south then turns to the north; round/round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there's nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is new?" It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them. I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that's done under heaven. 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...*

## I The **PREACHER**

The book starts w/ Solomon identifying himself as the **preacher**. The Hebrew word refers to **one who holds an influential position w/ the responsibility to deliver answers to the quandaries of life**. It refers to a prophet who offers a declaration of what he knows to be true.

**Who better than Solomon to deliver such a message?** Blessed by God w/ more wisdom/wealth than anyone could ever know, he used/mis-used his Divine gifts to experience the highs/lows of life. For along his life's journey, **he tried it all** only to conclude that absolutely nothing in this world can bring lasting satisfaction and fulfillment – **life w/out God is empty and w/out value**.

## II The **PROCLAMATION**

*Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." What do people gain from their labor at which they toil under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south then turns to the north; round/round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there's nothing new under the sun.*

While His proclamation might appear *depressing* – it’s actually quite profound/enlightening. For His words differentiate b/w the *meaningless* nature of **life under the sun** vs the *meaningful* nature of **life in the S.O.N.**

I call **life under the sun** the **DASH** – which is that line on a tombstone that separates a person’s start date from their departure date – from birth to death. *It’s their life here on earth from the womb to the tomb.*

In this case, it’s referring to how a person lives from a purely secular or humanistic worldview. Living only for themselves w/ no concern or view of God. Such a life (as Solomon experienced) will quickly find that:

*Life under the sun* is **fleeting, fatiguing, and futile** b/c w/ no God-intended purpose, creation is a fixed cycle constantly chugging along, repeating itself over/over w/ no respect for who’s alive and who’s died.

**meaningless** or **vanity of vanities** – the Hebrew word means a *vapor* or a *breath* – and refers not only to the shortness of life but also to the impact of one’s life – and Solomon has concluded no one will be significant.

I’m reminded of James 4:13-14 – *Listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this/that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you don’t even know what’ll happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*

**IMO** – *meaningless* isn’t a great translation here. A better translation might be **EMPTY** or **w/out value**.

**Let me show you.** In vs. 3, Solomon asks – *what do people gain* (or profit). The idea is that when you live your life down here *under the sun* w/ or w/out God – and die – you’re not going to have anything to show for it, **b/c everything will be left behind.** After all, as the Job taught us – *Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked will I depart.* (1:21)

**What about spiritual rewards?** Another sermon for another day. We’re talking about *life under the sun* – and **man has no profit.** *He is but a forgotten vapor.*

**Don’t believe me** – How many of you know the names of your grandparents? Me too! Do you know the names of your grandparent’s grandparents? And that quickly an entire generation has been forgotten.

**Let’s take it a step further.** Who here has grand/great grandkids? When your grandkids have grandkids – you too will likely be forgotten. Depressing I know... Why? **B/c we are vapors in a world that continues on!**

**Don’t believe me** – go to a funeral. I’ve been to too many lately. Yet they’re all the same. Someone stands up to recount the value of a person’s life – which might be significant to them, but when the service has concluded, everyone else returns to their homes or work – or they go out to eat – but we all return to life as we know it. Just now – minus a friend or loved one.

**Just this week,** I performed the funeral for a beautiful and precious saint. Yet I couldn’t help but notice that while her friends/loved ones celebrated/grieved her departure into eternity – the world around us kept busy about their lives. No one else stopped to take notice.

**Sad, I know.** Maybe Mark Twain was right – *the world will lament you for an hour and forget you forever.*

**Nelson** – we’re all like little dung beetles... busy at building a big life on earth w/ no earthly idea of why we’re doing it – not realizing one day it’ll all be gone.

**WHY?** B/c whether we’re here or not – the world is going to keep moving forward long after we’ve departed. This is the reality of **life under the sun.**

I think this is why Hemingway wrote – *life is a dirty trick; a short journey from nothingness to nothingness.*

It’s so incredibly depressing to consider, yet this is the plight of man here under the sun w/ out God. And this is Solomon’s point. **There is no meaning w/out God.**

Such is the reality of life on earth w/out God. You can try *secularism, intellectualism, atheism, materialism, hedonism,* or whatever **ISM** you want – but it’ll never bring meaning, purpose, or fulfillment b/c only God can define/determine a person’s worth/value.

Think of what Jesus said to His disciples – *Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their soul?*

Which brings us to some good news...

### III The **PRESCRIPTION**

Just like  $2 + 2 = 4$  – **the equation of life only makes sense w/ God in it** – b/c there’s more to life than what a person can experience in/thru this world – meaning is only discovered thru a relationship w/ God.

I think this is what’s intended in **Ecclesiastes 3:11** – Solomon wrote – *God has set eternity in your heart.*

**That is** – life can have meaning b/c God works everything out in His timing. So, when we live our lives in view of God, and in light of eternity, we will begin to see things differently – and everything in life, our time, values, priorities, finances – even our relationships will be viewed thru a different lens.

**Let me say this a different way** – if life on earth is all there is, and it really is about the survival of the fittest – **then we all had better bow up and get to living it up** b/c once it’s over... it’s done! But if God is true, if He really is the creator/sustainer of life; then there’s more to life than than this temporary stop on planet earth.

I like how Bertrand Russell said it. *Unless you assume God, the question of life’s purpose is meaningless.*

*God has made everything for its own purpose.* Pr. 16:4

Frances Schaeffer once shared a story of an American girl who was attending college in Europe – where she was met w/ form of post-theism/nihilism that caused many of her friends to doubt the existence of God. In contrast, this girl had no problem intellectually w/ the questions she faced. Her friends asked her why she seemed so content, and she said, “It’s b/c I believe in an infinite, personal God who made us. Thus, we’re not just part of nature, but created in God’s image. I believe evil isn’t just something out there that looks unpleasant; it’s truly evil b/c it’s contrary to Him. I also believe this God has made Himself known in the Bible thru the person of Jesus Christ who came to save us from sin to give us hope/purpose. Her friends asked her where she learned these things, and she told them she had learned them from her father. So, they all went to her house and her father, Francis Schaeffer, began to show them how their worldview ultimately ended in despair. And a number of them came to faith in Christ.

So, **we all have a decision to make.** We can approach life like Lawn Chair Larry – embracing one hair-brain scheme after another while searching for something to scratch our itch and satisfy our need for meaning w/out any consideration for truth/God. **OR** we can abandon the cul-da-sac of all the ISM’s of man that cannot bring true satisfaction/meaning – to accept that life here under the sun only works when we **BEND** our knee, **BOW** our hearts, and **BELIEVE** in the one true God.

## **TAKEAWAYS**

When it comes to the meaning of life, everyone needs a reality check to make sure they are not deceived.

Since there is more to life than what a person can experience through this world – the equation of life only makes sense with God in it.

Unless you assume and believe in God, the question of life's purpose is meaningless.

## **NEXT STEPS**

1 Spend time this week in your quiet time or with another person discussing these GROW questions.

**G** – When was the last time you had a reality check?

**R** – Re-read **Ecclesiastes 1:1-11**. What emotions do you feel and what truths do you see about life?

**O** – Re-read **Proverbs 16:4**? What is the *ISM* that is currently driving your sense of life purpose?

**W** – What steps of faith do you need to make to have a reality check that re-connects you with God?

2 This week, at work or school – or even watching TV, take note of the *ISM*'s that drive other people and consider how these philosophies impact you.