

Sermon Notes: Ecclesiastes #5 — Hevel and the Sovereignty of God

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1–15 (NKJV) — *1 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven: 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; A time of war, And a time of peace. 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. 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. 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. 15 That which is has already been, And what is to be has already been; And God requires an account of what is past.*

Take Away: *All of Solomon's discussion of hevel can start to have the effect on us that perhaps time, chance, and death are outside of God's control. Hevel can feel like the wind, it is fickle and it changes directions seemingly at random. But Solomon moves to affirm God's sovereign control over His creation and our lives. God has appointed times, and not let random chance run amok. When we fear that God has lost control, we need to look at the cross of Christ, the event that He has fixed in space and time to which hevel has no power.*

I. “But, can we make it unscathed?”: *(References: Ephesians 1:11; Isaiah 46:9-10; Daniel 4:35; Psalm 139:16; Genesis 50:20)*

II. What is the Good Life again for Solomon: *(References:)*

III. So where do we look for then answer?: *(References: Acts 2:22-24; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:28-30)*

Review:

1. ***Last time we looked at Solomon's point that wisdom is, in fact, better than folly under the sun.*** We were reminded that Ecclesiastes is a book about *discernment—discerning between good and evil*. Solomon wants us to resist throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It is far easier to go about things that way but it isn't using kingly wisdom. Solomon says that while wisdom, if pursued as a totalizing narrative under the sun, is hevel, wisdom is still *better* than folly. Why? Because folly is the path of *self-inflicted pain, anxiety, and suffering*. Solomon compares folly to walking with eyes closed. The world under the sun is already hard enough, *why bring pain upon yourself?* Wisdom on the other hand is walking with one's eyes open, and thus is a far better way to live under the sun. Yet, Solomon doesn't release the tension here. He is bothered that while wisdom is better than folly, *both die and are forgotten the same*. Death comes for both the fool and the wise.
2. ***This led Solomon to begin considering his actions by the light of his death.*** While we as moderns hate this, we'd love to push death away from us as far as possible, Solomon shows that it is wise to consider our actions from the perspective of death. *We should live our lives backwards*. When Solomon does this, he realizes that he will have to hand all of his accomplishments to the person after him and what if he is a fool? Someone in the assembly might desire to comfort Solomon here by reminding him of his legacy. Surely his legacy will live on no matter what his son might do after him! Solomon sees through this though: it is highly likely that people won't remember him at all. Trying to secure a legacy with your own hands *is also hevel and shepherding the wind under the sun*. The truth is, outside of the witness of Scripture, *we have no historical or archeological evidence for Solomon's accomplishments. We don't even have an inscription of his name*. This, the second test of a totalizing narrative is also broken. No human can take comfort in securing a legacy for themselves.
3. ***This is because a legacy is something that only God can give as a gift.*** Here we have the first glimmer of hope from Solomon: *there is something good to do under the sun—to eat and drink and take pleasure in your labor*. Solomon does what Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount. He shows that *today* is enough for us. We need to stop playing the "if I only could" game and see the gifts that God has given right in front of us. The gift of our spouse. The gift of our family. The gift of our children. The gift of our friends. The gift of our labor. The gift of the table with good food and drink. Solomon's command carries with it a deeper typological view: *that God has left a legacy, the greatest legacy that could ever be left, in bread and wine. Jesus Christ died to save sinners, and we memorialize Him sitting around His table to partake of bread and wine. That is a table that hevel cannot touch*.

Questions for the Table:

1. Read or sing through Psalm 139. How can it be a boost to your faith that in God's book He has written all your days before you have walked in them?
2. How does being "under the sun" and bound by time also give us authentic choice to obey or disobey God?
3. Discuss the following: Does Frodo make an authentic choice to take the ring to Mordor? Must he resolve to go even if he does not know if he will succeed? How about from Tolkien's perspective? Could there be any other outcome than the ultimate destruction of the Ring? (If you have it, read chapter 11 of *Perelandra* by C. S. Lewis)
4. What are some of the doubts about God's sovereignty that run through your mind?
5. How is the cross, the ultimate display of how God is able to use our evil to bring about something beautiful?