



MEANINGLESS

AUDIO DEVOTIONS

ON ECCLESIASTES

If you are unfamiliar with the book of Ecclesiastes, “Meaningless” may not sound like a fitting title for a devotional series, but once you understand something of the book’s author and his purpose, the appropriateness becomes crystal clear. Ecclesiastes was written by a man who is called, “the Teacher” or possibly “the Collector” of wise sayings. We are told he was a son of David and a king in Jerusalem, who lived in incredible wealth and luxury. We learn in the concluding chapter that he was also wise and penned many exquisite proverbs. Put all these criteria together and only one individual fits this description: the author is King Solomon, to whom the LORD once appeared in a dream and offered him anything his heart desired. Solomon asked for wisdom to lead God’s great people, and in response God promised him not only unequalled wisdom, but also wealth, honor, and, if obedient, a long life (cf. 2 Kings 3:1-15). By worldly standards Solomon had it all.

So why the title, “Meaningless”? Solomon uses this word 35 times in twelve chapters to describe the emptiness and transitory nature of what he calls, “life under the sun”—that is life as it appears on the outside, what we can deduce with our reason and conscience, apart from the sacred revelation of God. As one who had access to anything a person could possibly want and also possessing the God-given wisdom to see to the heart of every matter, Solomon was uniquely situated to accurately assess the meaning of life. Where others have had to resort to philosophizing due to their limited time and resources, Solomon was able to test by experience with himself as the subject. His investigation follows the “spiraling” style of eastern wisdom literature where the same subject matter is repeatedly addressed rather than all at once. Herein Solomon explores many of the mirages where we hope to find enduring meaning, only to have our prize vaporize like smoke in the end.

Armed with this understanding, let’s dig into Ecclesiastes Chapter 1:1-11, where Solomon laments how we people come and go, but the earth seems to remain forever.

We Come and Go, but the Earth Remains

- ¹ *The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:*
- ² *“Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher.*
“Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”
- ³ *What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?*
- ⁴ *Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever.*
- ⁵ *The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises.*
- ⁶ *The wind blows to the south and turns to the north;*
round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.
- ⁷ *All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full.*
To the place the streams come from, there they return again.
- ⁸ *All things are wearisome, more than one can say.*
The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing.
- ⁹ *What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again;*
there is nothing new under the sun.
- ¹⁰ *Is there anything of which one can say, “Look! This is something new”?*
It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time.
- ¹¹ *There is no remembrance of men of old,*
and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.

We say, “Life is short.” How true! Moses wrote in Psalm 90 that our years are 70 or 80, if we have the strength (v.10). And when we compare the duration of our lives to the seemingly endless endurance of the earth, our impermanence is even more pronounced. All our days are only a fading breath, a blip on the radar, compared to the ongoing sweep of geological time. As far as we can tell the earth and its cycles of day and night, seasons and years, the water cycle, the rock cycle, the carbon and nitrogen cycles, respiration and photosynthesis, tirelessly keep on ticking and outlasting us all. Furthermore, we are confined to the perpetual present where our senses never get enough of feeling, seeing, and hearing. As soon as we perceive something, it is gone and all that remains is a fading memory.

But should we imagine, as some do, that our memory will live on, the Teacher says don't hold your breath and don't flatter yourself. After all, what do you really know about your great grandparents--only three generations ago? I'm willing to bet it's almost all superficial surface information: their names, occupations, country of origin, and a handful of black and white photographs that are growing more translucent by the day. Their personalities, their hopes and dreams, their life's struggles and achievements all are forgotten in the fog of time.

Solomon's sobering assessment that “there is nothing new under the sun” and that the lives of ancient people are entirely lost to us is proven all the more accurate by the findings of modern archeology. If you take even a glance at any archaeological news feed, you'll read article after article about how scientists are using drones and ground penetrating radar to discover the remnants of vast advanced organized civilizations capable of supporting tens of thousands in some of the most unlikely places on earth--in the middle of the Amazon rainforest, in the Sahara, in the Caucasus Mountains--with many of these predating our previous discoveries by thousands of years. The more we uncover of history the less we truly know and the smaller we are. An appropriate response to such awareness is humility and an acceptance of the meaninglessness that will likewise envelop us: “even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow.”

The realization of our insignificance could easily drive us to despair, but it does not need to. Rather it provides us with powerful motivation to seek significance in the eternal God, who is more enduring than the earth beneath our feet, the one who reveals himself as the almighty Creator of the world (Gen. 1) and the hand-fashioner of our bodies and souls (Psalm 139:13-18). In infinite kindness he takes intense interest in the specks that we are. In fact, he has promised and fulfilled his plan to give us everlasting life with him through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ. Upon death our souls will live with him. At the end of time our bodies will be resurrected and our souls reunited with our flesh. By God's grace and power we will outlast this current wearing-out, sin-broken world and inherit paradise.



For your self-reflection:

- 1.) Do a quick internet search to investigate any of the “endless” cycles that we observe in nature. What did you find fascinating? What does that teach you about the invisible God who is behind it all?
- 2.) Of all that has been handed down to you from your ancestors, what do you treasure most? In light of Solomon's words, what do you consider most important to hand down to the next generation?



Prayer: Almighty Father in heaven, you are the everlasting God. We praise you for making this world to sustain our passing lives. We thank you for giving us each a length of days to find you and the forgiveness and eternal life you have for us through Jesus Christ our Lord. In him we are insignificant no longer. Amen.