

"Is There Meaning to Life?"

Ecclesiastes 1

The Bible is sometimes referred to as the 'Answer Book' because in it you can find the answers to life's deepest questions. Why am I here? What is my purpose? Is there life after death? All are big questions that we want answers for. The reason why the Bible gives those answers because in God's sovereign oversight through its being written by holy men guided by the Spirit, God asks the questions Himself, so that we can have the answers.

And so, in God's sovereign plan He will use a sinful relationship (David & Bathsheba), who after repenting of his sin has a son whom he names 'Peace' [Solomon], whom God will choose over David's previously born sons to be the next king over Israel. The king who experiences Israel's greatest era of peace and success, and yet in this peace and success is disillusioned by these very things that are supposed to make one happy.

Isn't that what most people want? Be a success in life so you can have the things you want? Yet here's a firsthand eye-witness testimony of the world's wealthiest and most successful ruler who writes that success is not the road to happiness. So then what is? Throughout the book Solomon tells us that true happiness can only be found in a relationship with God. You can't understand Ecclesiastes if you don't know how he finishes it, where he writes in 12:13-14

¹³ *Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter:*

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

¹⁴ *For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.*

And twice in that final chapter he charges young people to remember God in the days of their youth, before you get old. Follow God early in life. Learn from someone who wanted it all, had it all, tried it all and guess what, didn't find meaning and joy apart from God or as he says numerous times, "under the sun"; meaning looking at life alone by itself from a horizontal only viewpoint.

Like the Proverbs, Solomon's target audience is primarily young people, although it is a message for anyone who still wrestles with life's perplexities, imbalances and unanswered questions. Because along the way, Solomon will make observations about life that he has journalled in his pursuit of happiness, that don't seem logical. That seem to go against what people expect or logically should happen. And if you don't have God as your anchor, you will not find the answer 'under the sun'.

He introduces himself in v.1,

The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

And expands on that in v.12

¹² *I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! ¹⁴ I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*

He refers to himself as 'the Teacher' or the Hebrew Quohel, because it's not his authority as king that he speaks from but as king he had a life of luxury and peace to observe all he had. So his

desire is to gather people around him and share what he's learned. As the wisest man whoever lived, this makes sense. We should listen to Solomon. And in case you don't recall the background to Solomon's wisdom, back in 1 Kings 3 God appeared to Solomon in a dream and asked him 'for anything you want me to give you.'" Instead of riches and power Solomon asked God for

a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong.

And God honoured that request and said in 3:12

I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.

And we read of Solomon in 1 Kings 4:29

²⁹ God gave Solomon wisdom and very great insight, and a breadth of understanding as measureless as the sand on the seashore. ³⁰ Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt. ³¹ He was wiser than any other man, including Ethan the Ezrahite—wiser than Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol. And his fame spread to all the surrounding nations. ³² He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs numbered a thousand and five. ³³ He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish. ³⁴ Men of all nations came to listen to Solomon's wisdom, sent by all the kings of the world, who had heard of his wisdom.

And yet he was only a limited man who had a sin nature as we do and as the wisest, wealthiest man who ever lived during an unprecedented time of peace and prosperity, he still struggled to find joy under the sun. So he tells in vv.2-11 that

The World Appears as if it is Directionless **(1:1-8)**

What's the point of creation? It seems like it just goes on and on without purpose:

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.*

The word for 'meaningless' or vanity' means a vapour, a mist, something that appears and disappears, something that has no lasting significance. And Solomon would be correct

If we don't see it from God's perspective (vv.1-3; Col. 3:1-4)

This is what we always have to keep in mind going through the book. Solomon is looking at life 'under the sun', from an on the earth surface only perspective. Not 'a things above' perspective (as we've been noting often this year through Col. 3:1-3).

³ *What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?*

What's the benefit of life? What do we gain from all we do? Because we sure do a lot of stuff but for what and why? And why does work never end? We do similar things most days and what satisfaction comes from this? Solomon will talk more on this and give us an answer in Ch. 2.

But if we don't understand God made the world and we live an under the sun perspective, we will never get it. We'll think life has little purpose. And many people who put all their dreams on something under the sun – power, wealth, identity, job, things, status – will give up and sadly think it's better not to live than live without purpose. But here' another reality we have to learn. Life does appear directionless

If we're unaware of the impact of sin (vv.4-8; Rom. 8:18-25)

From a human perspective, life just seems to go on and on. You get up in the morning (sunrise), you shower, eat, go to work/school, eat lunch, go back to work, school, come home, do chores/homework, eat supper. Maybe watch a little TV in the evening, go to bed, sun goes down. This is what Solomon is talking about, the seemingly endless monotony of the routines of life even including creation. Water always flows but nothing ever overflows. Wind blows one way today, then another tomorrow. People are born, people die. Life just goes on and on and on as if there is no point to it.

But when Adam and Eve sinned the whole world was affected. People started to age and eventually die. The creation itself was cursed and now work is hard and so you keep having to do it all the time because sin creates more problems and sinful people don't cooperate, and what you finished this week just starts again next week. Listen to Romans **8:19**

¹⁹ *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*

²² *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

Faith in Jesus, who alone pays the penalty for sin, results in being freed one day from its presence, and through the Holy Spirit now, gives us tastes of eternity when we are victorious over the temptations sin offers us. This is the hope we have one day and creation looks forward to the day when it will be perfect and no longer affected by sin.

Solomon continues his downward spiral as he looks at life under the sun only and states that

It Seems Like our Accomplishments Don't Matter **(1:9-11)**

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.

If we're here to make a name for ourselves, we will be disappointed. Once in awhile someone does something extraordinary. And for a short time they are in the spotlight but then someone does what they did or even better.

We all remember the names of the first two astronauts on the moon – Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin – but who were the next two on the moon, only 4 months later in Nov. 1969? Pete Conrad and Alan Bean. Apparently the highest TV ratings ever for a live program was the Apollo 11 moon landing. So they showed Apollo 12 mission live too but ratings were lower and the mission was almost flawless. So that it looked like it wasn't hard to do. Interest in the Apollo program had dropped off so much that in the spring when Apollo 13 mission flew they didn't televise it live except the liftoff. So that most of the world was totally unaware of the problem they encountered that forced them to abandon the moon landing and miraculously make it home alive. Now it's a Tom Hanks movie.

Once we do something unusual or unique the novelty wears off. That first hole-in-one is great, but you know the second and third ones are no big deals! Good verses to remember when we're tempted to exalt self are.

Ps. 115:1 Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

Jesus' name is the greatest name of all. There is salvation found in no other name. Paul said of Jesus in Phil 2:9

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,
¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Which is rather ironic because Jesus lived to glorify His Father, in John 17:1-4

Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.

God will remember all our accomplishments which we did for His glory; not our own. Glorifying God has an eternal significance. How can you do any better than that?

Solomon introduces a subject he will expand more in in v.12-16. As the wisest person on earth Solomon rightly concluded

Knowledge Can't Provide all the Answers **(1:12-16)**

¹³ I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men!

Why is exploring knowledge and wisdom such a heavy burden? Because we are finite and

We're not God who is over all (vv.12-13)

Solomon indicates here where he's ultimately going. God is over all of us. He's above the sun. Understanding everything we possibly can will never satisfy us because we are not God and we can't know everything. And yet we try don't we. Even if it kills us, like the mini sub Titan that took 5 people to the ocean floor to get an even closer look at the Titanic only to implode because it wasn't built for that kind of pressure or a problem ensued. Why do we go down there? Because we want to know everything. That's not a bad thing but if you make that your life pursuit, you will fail. We're not God. We didn't make the world. There are hundreds of TV programs, thousands of books, miles and miles of film exploring the world and universe, new telescopes being built so we can look even deeper into space – which surprise, surprise doesn't seem to end – and yet we cannot know it all. It is a heavy burden.

And the more knowledge we pursue, the more roadblocks and problems we encounter.

¹⁴ *I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*

¹⁵ *What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.*

¹⁶ *I thought to myself, "Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge." ¹⁷ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.*

¹⁸ *For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.*

We're not equipped to solve all life's complexities (vv.14-18)

Solomon says he's seen it all, he's tried to solve it all. But the twisted problems of the world can't always be straightened and everything simply can't be catalogued, counted and put in a box or library and say, 'Well, we've got all the world's information collected now. There is nothing more to do. Since Solomon concluded pursuing wisdom is endless and unsatisfying, maybe I should do the opposite; let's pursue brainless madness and folly. Let all inhibitions go. Enjoy life to its fullest pleasures, regardless of knowledge. Regardless of who you hurt. Regardless of your own integrity ... (he's expand on this in Ch. 2) but I learned that this too is trying to catch the wind. The more you know, the more you don't know. You can't figure it all out. You can't know everything and you don't. You can only know a little bit more than someone else, and sadly even then we often use it as a way to exalt self and humble others.

So here we are, about 2900 years since Solomon wrote this and we haven't gotten much further. Oh yes, technology has increased exponentially but we still don't know it all. We're still unsatisfied with who we are, what we're trying to do or who we're trying to become. Under the sun it seems very directionless and unsatisfying.

Learn early in life that God is above all this, somehow controlling all this, using all this and whatever happens to us, for a single purpose. To draw us to Himself through His Son Jesus, who paid the penalty of sin (the reason why life seems so pointless) so that we could fine eternal life. *"I have come that you might have life and have it to the full"* (John 10:10).

The reason why nothing satisfies us under the sun is because everything under the sun is marred by sin. So until we solve our sin problem we'll keep pursuing that new thing, new job, new relationship, new experience ... that we keep discovering doesn't satisfy, yet we keep trying because we refuse to believe God is all satisfying. If you know the Lord this morning but have been struggling with life because you're pursuing the things God has made more than God Himself, repent and return to Him. Find that what David said in Ps. 34 :8 is true, *"Taste and see that the Lord is good."* And if

you've never trusted Christ and want a purposeful life, confess you are a sinner in need of saving. Ask Jesus to forgive you and accept Him as Lord of your life. He's Lord of the world already. But He's not going to Lord himself over us unless we want Him. And His lordship over us is gracious and loving, not overbearing. Because He wants us to find life and purpose and joy through a relationship with Him. He made the world. He will destroy this world one day. It will end but a new one awaits us in His presence where we get to enjoy Him forever.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please
contact us at olivet@rideau.net