

All Is Vanity

by David Hocking

David Hocking's sermon explores the themes of vanity and the search for meaning in life as presented in the book of Ecclesiastes.

Duration: 57:21

Scripture: 1 Kings 4:29, Ecclesiastes 1:16, Ecclesiastes 5:1, Ecclesiastes 11:9, Ecclesiastes 12:9, Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Topics: "Vanity Of Life", "Fleeting Wealth"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the futility of pursuing worldly goals and pleasures. He emphasizes that these pursuits do not bring lasting satisfaction or fulfillment. The preacher highlights that nothing in life is truly new, as everything has been experienced before. He also points out that the pursuit of wealth and material possessions is ultimately meaningless, as they do not bring true joy or contentment. The preacher concludes that life is not worth living if the sole focus is on achieving temporary and fleeting goals.

Transcript

Our series today begins in the book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is a book that a lot of people through the years have wondered, should it really be in the canon? I don't think there's any doubt about it, but if you've read the book through in its entirety, you'll find it to be quite strange, different. There are a multitude of interpretations, as wide and diverse as a pessimistic view of life to an optimistic view of life.

Exactly the opposite. Very strange book indeed. We want to deal with two questions as we begin this series.

One is, who wrote the book? And secondly, why was it written? Let's look to the Lord in a moment of prayer as we begin. Father in heaven, we thank you, we praise you for your wonderful love to us through Jesus Christ our Lord. God, you are a great God.

There's nothing too hard for you. You can do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think. Father, we thank you that you're concerned about the affairs of our lives.

You're concerned about the details, every activity. There's no sparrow that falls from the tree that you don't know about. All the hairs of our head are numbered.

You say that you take care of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air, and how much more shall our heavenly Father take care of us? God, we thank you. And I pray you'd help us to understand life as we study your word, as we examine this great book in the Old Testament concerning what life is all about and why it should be lived in the first place. God, I pray that you'd help us to understand your perspective and your viewpoint.

And we'll thank you and praise you for it in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's read the first chapter of Ecclesiastes and then deal with our two basic questions today as to who wrote the book and why was it written.

The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Vanity of vanities, says the preacher. Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.

What prophet has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away and another generation comes, but the earth abides forever. The sun also rises and the sun goes down and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes toward the south and turns around to the north and the wind whirls about continually and comes again on its circuit.

All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place from which the rivers come, there they return again. All things are full of labor.

Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is what will be.

That which is done is what will be done. There is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, see, this is new? It has already been in ancient times before us.

There's no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after. I, the preacher, was king over Israel and Jerusalem, and I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven, this grievous task God has given to the sons of man by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and indeed all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

What is crooked cannot be made straight. What is lacking cannot be numbered. I communed with my heart, saying, Look, I have attained greatness, and I have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem.

My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge, and I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceive that this also is grasping for the wind, for in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. It's interesting that Ecclesiastes is one of the roles that is publicly read at Jewish festivals.

In particular, it's read on the third day of the Feast of Tabernacles, which I remind you is a feast of joy. I doubt seriously that they would read a book that was morbid, pessimistic, and depressing at the Feast of Tabernacles when it's a time to rejoice and to praise God. That alone tells you something about the nature of Ecclesiastes, at least from a Jewish point of view.

Also, the great questions about Ecclesiastes that have existed among Christians as to whether or not it's really a book of God. Does it belong in the canon? This question has been asked over and over again. The very books on Ecclesiastes, commentaries that we've acquired, and Al and I have been acquiring as

many as we possibly can, it's kind of interesting that all we've acquired, they spend links, volumes of pages, talking about who wrote the book and whether it belongs in the canon.

And yet it seems to me that we ought to look to the Jewish people who had committed to them, entrusted to them the Scriptures according to Romans 3, and look at how they regarded it. For instance, the Jewish writers of the first seven centuries of the Christian era quote at least 122 of these 222 verses in their writings. At the time of Herod the Great, the time when our Lord was born, and in the time of Gamaliel, who is mentioned in the book of Acts, the book is cited by Jewish writers as holy Scripture.

At the Synod of Jamnia in 90 A.D., following the destruction of Jerusalem, when the Jews gathered together to put their act together and to again declare what they believed was the Word of God, the school of Shammai began to question whether or not Ecclesiastes belonged in the Bible because it fails to mention the name of Jehovah, even though the name of God is mentioned some 39 times. But that particular council of Jamnia in 90 A.D., Jewish leaders decided beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is a part of God's Word and it is canonical in the sense it belongs in God's Word. It seems to me that this book is written for a wider audience, however, than the children of Israel, and that explains somewhat of the dilemma.

Whoever wrote this book, I believe had a sensitivity not only to the people of Israel but to all the nations around them. I have never come to a book that I believe is so contemporary in one sense to our generation than Ecclesiastes. What the writer talks about here are the basic questions we deal with every day.

What the writer deals with in this book are questions that a secular world is asking and they need answers. I like what a lot of writers say about Ecclesiastes. It's kind of a cultural apologetics.

It is appealing to a secular world in saying, let's tell you exactly what is the answer to life, what's the meaning to life, why we're here. Let's tell you exactly what God who created us really wants of us. I think it's a book for the secular humanists of every generation as well as for the believer.

The believer is confused at times because of that. The believer reads this book and wonders, is this advice from man or is this advice from God? It's interesting to me how many times this happens to you. Just two months ago, I was discussing a particular matter that is really proven to be a fact in the book of Ecclesiastes.

And the Christian that I was discussing with immediately said, but that's in Ecclesiastes. I said, what has that got to do with it? They said, well, that passage in Ecclesiastes is only worldly wisdom. I said, does it say in Ecclesiastes that this is worldly wisdom? And it says, well, no, but if you understand the whole meaning of it, that's the point of it.

You know, I want to understand the meaning of this thing. I want to really get after it. But I'll tell you, it's interesting that the average Christian looks at Ecclesiastes as kind of a secular book filled with worldly wisdom.

And most people say the only thing good about it are the last couple of verses where he tells you the conclusion of the whole matter is to fear God and keep His commandments. Well, I'm going to give you a totally different view of this book, because I believe this book is not only intended for the believer, but is intended also as a book of evangelism. It's a cultural apologetic, all right.

It's to tell the secular world who God is and what He has in mind for you and what life is all about. It asks basic questions about whether life is even worth living. And with the depressed state of most people in this particular culture of ours, always questioning, always fearing, always suspicious, always pessimistic, always critical, always doubting, always questioning, having no security and stability, no joy, no happiness, no lasting satisfaction.

I say to you, Ecclesiastes is the message for you. It has much to tell us. Now, who wrote the book? Let's look at the person who wrote the book.

Why do people criticize the obvious fact that Solomon wrote the book? It's because they see things in the book that they don't believe Solomon either would have said or could have said. Example down in verse 12 when he says, I, the preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. They remind you that Solomon was king until the day he died.

And the text reads literally, I have been king. It suggests he was king at once, but not king now. That isn't really necessary in the grammar, but some people are a little picky with it.

It's easy for me to say that. I have been a preacher, and I still am. It's easy for me to say it, and that way to anybody in any context.

I don't think that proves a thing. Some people say the preacher is different than the king, that a king would never be a preacher. The very word ecclesiastes is the Greek word for preacher, literally one who is addressing an assembly.

It does not necessarily mean a preacher of the word, though that's our modern connotation. For instance, in Acts 19, there is a mob in Ephesus, and the Bible calls it an assembly, and a town clerk tries to address that assembly. He is an ecclesiastes, or the Hebrew word koaleth.

He is a preacher. He is a public talker. He is publicly addressing assembly.

As a matter of fact, kings are also called this. So there's no confusion in my mind as to why Solomon would have been one to address an assembly. Who else besides the king to have addressed and publicly declared points that he wanted to get across to his constituents? I don't see there's any problem there.

Let me tell you why I think Solomon wrote the book. Six reasons. One, the title.

Verse one, the words of the preacher, the son of David. How can you miss that? King in Jerusalem. So I believe we've got a very clear-cut statement here that he has to be a son of David.

Some writers say, well, he could be down in history a little bit further. True, but a son of David, king in Jerusalem. How can we miss the point? It's got to be Solomon.

When I look at verse 12, I, the preacher, was king over Israel and Jerusalem. I think of a second reason why it's Solomon. Not simply the title, but his home.

In fact, turn over to chapter 5, verse 1. Let me show you something interesting. I believe we can nail down the time period of the book as to who it might be who wrote it. In chapter 5, verse 1, it says, when you go to the house of God.

Now, the house of God refers to the temple. The temple was destroyed in 586 B.C. So it has to be a king in that period. It's interesting.

Many, many people think it was written around the Persian or Greek period much later. But impossible. The writer is talking about going to the temple.

The temple has to be standing. As a matter of fact, it assumes in this section that the writer lives near the temple. And that would match with the earlier statements in chapter 1. Son of David, king in Jerusalem.

In fact, look at verse 16 of chapter 1. Just a little reminder. The writer starts talking. I communed with my heart, saying, etc., etc.

I gained more wisdom than all who were before me in where? In Jerusalem. He emphasizes the place where he lives. Chapter 2, verse 7. I acquired male and female servants, had servants born in my house, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

Now, whoever this person is, he had much more than anyone else did in Jerusalem before me. Almost saying, in terms of kings, because he is calling himself a king in Jerusalem. Look at chapter 2, verse 9. I became great, excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem again.

So, not only is title son of David king, but also his home. He's in Jerusalem. It also points to Solomon.

Third, let's take a look at his age. His age. Turn to chapter 11 of the book.

You may say, why don't you just say it's Solomon and keep going? Hey, I want you to know this book, but I'll tell you there's a very definite reason. If it's Solomon, then many things in the book are going to be interpreted in a certain way. There is no man's life, with the exception of a few others, in the Old Testament, but there's no man's life that is so dealt with in terms of details and facts and attitudes than the life of Solomon.

If Solomon is the writer, then it opens up a fantastic insight to what the writer is actually saying. Especially as we look at the matter of his age. How old is the man? Verse 9 says, Rejoice, O young man, in your youth.

He obviously is not, therefore, a young man. In chapter 12, verse 1, Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth before the difficult days come. In describing that in the first eight verses, and I'll let you just glance through it.

It's interesting, the way it's described, people say it's got to be an old person here. Verse 6 repeats, Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed or the golden bowl is broken or the pitcher shattered at the fountain or the wheel broken at the well. Then the dust will return to the earth as it was and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

And most writers will say who's ever writing the book is an old man. And I agree with that. He's an old man who writes the book.

As a matter of fact, it's interesting, the Jewish view states that Solomon wrote it in his old age when he was weary of life to expose the emptiness and vanity of all worldly pursuits and carnal gratifications and to show that the happiness of man consists in fearing God and obeying his commands. End of quote. Straight from Jewish writers.

As a matter of fact, the Jewish Midrash says that Solomon wrote it in the quote, evening of his days. He wrote the Song of Solomon in his youth and Proverbs at middle age. Isn't that an interesting insight into those three books of Solomon? So I kind of agree with that view.

Song of Solomon, he's writing about the love of his heart and he's a young man. But when he comes to Proverbs, he's at the height of his wisdom. What a wonderful book that is.

And no wonder the Jews said it was at a middle age when he understood things. It had to be middle age in one sense because he writes also to children and writes about things that they experience as though a father would and discusses himself as a father. But when you come to Ecclesiastes, that's all gone.

It's a long time in the past. He's now rich in years and he's looking at life from the whole life that has lived it like no one else in the ancient world had ever lived it. No one had ever experienced what Solomon had.

And that's another reason why the book is so contemporary and so important for this generation. That we look at a man who really lived it all. Who had the advantages of everything some of us are still seeking.

We look at that man and we look at his evaluation and we learn a great deal. Yes, I believe the man is old. I also think it's Solomon because of his marital experiences.

Look back at chapter 7 of Ecclesiastes. I think this ought to remind you also of Solomon. In chapter 7, verse 26, he says, I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters.

He who pleases God shall escape from her, but the sinner shall be taken by her. I remind you that those women he married, according to the Bible, led his heart away to foreign gods. Interesting, because down in verse 28, he says, after verse 27, here's what I found, says the preacher, adding one thing to the other to find out the reason which my soul still seeks, but I cannot find.

One man among a thousand, interesting mentioning the thousand, one man among a thousand I found, but a woman among all these I have not found. Now gals, that isn't going to be your life verse, I know that. But that tells me it's Solomon.

Okay? That's Solomon. His marital experiences. Chapter 9, verse 9, he says, look at this insight in the light of it, if it's Solomon.

Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which he has given you under the sun, for this is your portion in life. If it's Solomon, it's the woman of the song of Solomon and he is telling you something there that is so very, very important in this day of lack of fidelity and lack of loyalty and lack of commitment, lack of understanding about God's purposes in marriage. What an interesting insight if it's Solomon himself that's writing this book.

But I think also the issue of his wisdom, it has to be Solomon. Look back at chapter 1 again, verse 13. He says, speaking in the first person, I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven.

This grievous task God has given to the sons of men by which they may be exercised and I've seen all the works that are done under the sun. Verse 16, I have attained greatness and gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. And chapter 12 of this book, the last chapter, verse 9, says, Moreover,

because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge.

Yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. Now, I cannot but believe this is Solomon. In 1 Kings chapter 4, and you might want to turn or at least jot it down as a footnote.

In 1 Kings chapter 4, verse 29, we read this about Solomon. That God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt.

For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan, the Ezraite, and Haman, Calico, and Darda, the sons of Mahal, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. He spoke three thousand proverbs. Now, Ecclesiastes 12, 9 speaks of his many proverbs.

He spoke three thousand proverbs and his songs, you talk about songwriters today, his songs were one thousand and five. He spoke of trees from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall. He spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish, and men of all nations from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom came to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

And I read in Ecclesiastes a man who says, I was wiser than anyone else and all who were before me. That's got to be Solomon. One last thing while I think about why I think it's Solomon who wrote the book, and that's his wealth.

Look at chapter 2, verse 4, and you tell me, is this not Solomon? And if it is Solomon, folks, then everything the book talks about, wealth, and wisdom, and meaning to life, are all going to mean something more than if it was some guy who had never experienced all of this. In chapter 2, verse 4, Solomon said, I made my works great. I built myself houses and planted myself vineyards.

I made myself gardens and orchards. I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.

I acquired male and female servants. I had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me.

I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, and musical instruments of all kinds. So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem.

It's Solomon, folks. There's no doubt about it. And because of that, the whole meaning of the book is going to be carefully evaluated as we go along.

We're going to see things that we would not have seen unless we understood that it was Solomon behind it. Writing in old age with bad marital experiences. Great wisdom.

Enormous wealth. He lived in Jerusalem. He was king at the time the empire of Israel was its greatest.

David, through his military conquest, had achieved it, but Solomon managed it and extended its borders. And Israel today has never experienced the size of its kingdom like it was under Solomon. He literally was the king of all the earth.

And they were coming to him for wisdom and advice and amazed. The queen of Sheba said the half has not been told about this man and his wealth. The silver and the gold that he had were like stones in Jerusalem, the Bible says.

He owned most of the supply of the horses of the world, and today archaeological discoveries find his horse stables and know this man was enormous in wealth and enormous in position. He had everything life could offer any man. And that's why Ecclesiastes is powerful to us in this generation.

That's who wrote the book. Let's ask, why did he write the book? What are the reasons for writing this book? What are the purposes of the book of Ecclesiastes? Now once you get this straight, you're ready to study it. But until you get it straight, you will never come out with a right view.

It's obvious even as you read, commentators who write on Ecclesiastes, depending on what they believe is the purpose of the book, that's the emphasis. And how tragic that we would come to a passage that God may want to say something powerful to us about our job for instance. But we write it off as being secular philosophy and not what God wants.

So it makes all the difference in the world to understand why was the book of Ecclesiastes written. And I think in these three purposes you see why it is so contemporary. One, the first purpose is to reveal the futility of all earthly pursuits.

Now if you're up and coming in your business right now and you're really seeking to achieve and to succeed, Ecclesiastes is going to trouble you a lot. Do not think it was written by a person who hadn't been to success seminars. This man knew it all.

Do not think it was written by a person who didn't know how to motivate people or to organize or to gain great productivity from what his hands did. This man did it all and better than anyone before him or after him. But the main purpose of the book is to reveal the futility of all earthly pursuits.

The truth of the matter is earthly pursuits and your obsession with them is what keeps you from knowing the eternal God and all of His glory. Worldly pleasures vainly call me, says the songwriter. I would be like Jesus, he said.

Hey, it is those worldly pursuits. It is earthly pursuits that keeps us from finding God's will and God's purpose for our own lives. And that deals with believers too.

That's why the book is written to both. Believers have this problem. We pursue things in life that we think are going to somehow achieve something for us.

Some of us are doing it because we want a sense of self-worth. And some because we want to be known for what we can do. It is fame.

It is popularity. And some because we've got to eat and we've got to live. And some because we want the power and the prestige and the things that money can buy.

And some of us because we want to satisfy the pleasures and we want to gratify our essential desires. There are all kinds of reasons why people are doing what they're doing. And Ecclesiastes has one message.

That all these worldly pursuits are futile and vain. A second purpose of the book is to realize the source of all that we enjoy in life. And this is the exact opposite.

The first point is so negative as it strips all of our ideas about why we should be successful and what we should do in life. But the second is a fundamental purpose of the book. To realize the source of all that we enjoy in life.

And that source is obviously God Himself. I would even put a subtitle on the book of Ecclesiastes that would surprise most Christians. And I would title the book How to Enjoy Life from God's Point of View.

Ecclesiastes is not against joy. The Hebrew word that translates joy or rejoicing is used seventeen times in the book. This is a book of joy.

Let me show you what I mean. In each section, he's going to conclude with a statement about joy that I've found Christians today think is secular wisdom and not God's wisdom. Boy, you can see the differences here when you read this book.

Look at chapter 2 for an example, verse 24. In this whole section of chapter 1 and 2 he shows the first purpose. And that is the futility of all earthly pursuits.

But now he's going to cause you to realize the source of all that we enjoy in life. Verse 24. There's nothing better for a man than he should eat and drink and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor.

Should a man enjoy work? Ecclesiastes answers, yes, absolutely. This also I saw was from the hand of God. For who can eat or who can have enjoyment more than I? For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in his sight.

But to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting that He may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind. Joy.

Look at chapter 3, verse 12. I know there's nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in their lives and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor. It is the gift of God.

I know people who read that. I know commentaries who say that's the wisdom of the world. Don't you believe a word of it? I'm sorry, friends.

I happen to believe that's from God Almighty. How to enjoy life from God's point of view. The major text of Ecclesiastes is that the pursuit of worldly things do not bring that lasting satisfaction, enjoyment.

That the real mystery is how can a guy pursue all of these things yet not enjoy them? And he gets to the end of achieving them all and there's a vacuum in his heart. He has not learned how to enjoy life. There are plenty of guys that are going to go to work tomorrow that they're still looking either for the paycheck that they're going to receive as the only moment of joy or they are looking for what they will achieve in their job.

The ultimate product and the success and the business we did this year over last year. And they will not enjoy tomorrow because of it. How does man enjoy today? People speak about smelling the flowers and enjoying the air and going to work with a smile on your heart and a zest for living.

How do you enjoy life? How do you do it? And Solomon answers that it's a gift from God and you better understand it. This is so crucial to the book to realize the source of all that we enjoy in life. Look at verse 22 of chapter 3. He concludes again another section and says so I perceive that there's nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his own works.

Is that worldly wisdom or is that wisdom for every one of us? And my argument is it's wisdom for every one of us. There's nothing better than a man should rejoice in his own works for that is his heritage for who can bring him to see what will happen after him? Half the time we don't enjoy the work of our own hands because something's wrong in our attitude in our relationship to God. That's the missing element.

That's the vacuum. That's what's wrong in society. People are not relating to God in this matter and thus say they're not understanding how to enjoy life now, today, even though I have an enormous amount of problems today.

I can enjoy life if I understand my relationship to God. Another example. Turn to chapter 5. Look at verse 18.

Again, summarizing his whole discussion about wealth and money. And he says here's what I've seen. It's good and fitting for one to eat and drink and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him for it is his heritage.

As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth and given him power to eat of it to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor this is the wisdom of the world. Is that what it says? No, it says this is the gift of God for he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life because God keeps him busy look at this with the joy of his heart. Isn't that interesting? You see right there the problem, the dilemma that most of us have.

Why we're so ticked off and upset half the time? Our relationship to God is fundamental to the joy that we experience in what our hands do every day of our life. I like what one writer said on the basis of this you can wash dishes to the glory of God and God knows how much I hate that. As you well know the writer was a husband.

But how to enjoy what our hands do? It's a matter of our relationship to God. Look at chapter 8 verse 15 the book is just filled with this theme of joy and learning to enjoy life. In Ecclesiastes 8, 15 he says So I commended enjoyment because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink and be merry.

For this will remain with him in his labor for the days of his life which God gives him under the sun. Interesting advice. Doesn't tell you what eternity holds.

Doesn't tell you that God's going to bring everything under judgment. Just wait. That's coming also.

But realizing the source of all that we enjoy in life it's a message of the book. Chapter 9 verse 7 Again Go eat your bread with joy, drink your wine with a merry heart for God has already accepted your works. Let your garments always be white and let your head lack no oil.

Interesting. He's not advocating mourning or pessimism or putting on sackcloth and ashes. He's telling you how to enjoy life from God's point of view.

In chapter 11 verse 9 Rejoice oh young man in your youth and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. The message is continuous throughout the book. So we got these purposes.

One we got the great purpose that is obvious in the book to reveal the futility of all earthly pursuits. But we also have the purpose to realize the source of all we enjoy in life and that's God himself. The third purpose of the book is to remember our ultimate accountability to God.

Put those things together. Worldly pursuits futile, vain, empty. But on the other hand those pursuits I can learn how to enjoy them in the performing of them as I relate properly to God.

But there's something that's in the background that you better face. And that is that ultimately I must answer to God for what I have done. To remember our ultimate accountability to God.

The name of God appears 39 times as I said earlier. And there are two things that are given in Ecclesiastes. They're not just once at the end of the book but throughout the book.

One is to fear God. Fear God. The Bible says the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge.

It is the fear of God that keeps you faithful and committed. The fear of God is the key. Do we fear Him? Do we understand who He is? Are we awed at His presence? Do we understand the great God who made us and what He wants and the fact that one day we will stand before Him? Fear God.

And number two is that God will bring you and every work you've done into judgment. Those two things are the summary of the book. And to a secular culture as well as a believing community God says Fear! Fear God! And secondly God will bring into judgment everything that you've done.

Every work that your hands have done. Just looking to the book on that turn back to chapter 3. Let me show you it's not just the conclusion. That it's throughout the book.

In chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes verse 14. I know that whatever God does it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it.

Nothing taken from it. God does it that men should fear before Him. The fear of God.

Look at chapter 5 verse 7. Our accountability before God is constantly emphasized. Our recognition of who God is by fear God. That phrase.

In chapter 5 verse 7 In the multitude of dreams and many words there's also vanity. But fear God. Chapter 7 verse 18 It is good that you grasp this and also not remove your hand from the other for he who fears God will escape them all.

Chapter 8 verse 12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and his days are prolonged yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God who fear before Him. But it will not be well with the wicked nor will he prolong his days which are as a shadow because he does not fear before God. Constant emphasis.

And then of course chapter 12 verse 13 which says let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter fear God. And you see folks when I look at this in this book I say that's what's wrong in our culture. There is no consciousness of God.

People are acting as though He doesn't exist. He's not aware of what's going on or He doesn't care or He's not concerned. We have eliminated God as a possibility.

And believers who say they believe in Him and believe in His Son Jesus Christ can go to work tomorrow and completely ignore the presence of the eternal God who says you can't enjoy life without me. Why do Christians wind up being unhappy and defeated and depressed in what they are doing? Is it not because we once again fall into the trap of the secular world pursuing some fleeting fantasy some goal out there that never really brings happiness once we achieve it? We can't go to work tomorrow and recognize that God Almighty can give me joy in whatever I do. Whether it's digging a ditch or mowing the lawn or washing the dishes or handling a report at a desk or talking to an employee no matter what it is God can give me joy if I understand my relationship to Him.

The message of Ecclesiastes in my opinion is powerful for this generation where we've lost our consciousness of God. The focus is not on God it's on man and you know it and I know it. I hope you're with me in this that I'm praying and asking God that somehow this generation can turn its focus back to God.

I don't know how it's going to happen I walk into Christian bookstores and I get grieved. I can't find books that I'd like to have because nobody's interested in buying books that are heavy on God. I look at the books and I see you and self.

I see books that are dedicated to a culture that is absolutely obsessed with itself and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with finding out who you are and all of that stuff you can read it in the Bible though and it saves time. What I am saying is that we're missing our relationship to God. The culture is not interested in God.

Even Christians today they're all they're all on the horizontal plane and any discussions of vertical all of a sudden seem to be uncomfortable and is that necessary and the whole attitude towards God today is wrong. Ecclesiastes says fear God. Solomon at the height of his glory and wisdom says over and over again in Proverbs that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge and knowledge of the Holy One is true understanding.

To know God is the highest pursuit we could ever desire in our lives. It is a mark of maturity when a Christian can finally settle down from all the glorious experiences that other Christians and ministries have promoted him to and can finally rest and relax in one thing and that's to know God better today than I did yesterday and to stop all the other trips and all the other divisive things in Christianity and come down to one ultimate question who is God? Do I know Him? Do I know how to worship Him?

God is spirit and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth for God the Father seeks such to worship Him and we're enamored with ourselves with our ministry we're entertaining ourselves we're looking at it in the sense of what we can gain from it and all the time I keep asking that basic question why are we here?

The Bible teaches that whether we eat or we drink or whatever we do we're to do all to the glory of God the Bible says that everything that God created was for His own pleasure and what's wrong with us today is that we are not remembering our ultimate accountability to God fearing God is not the question at all we're concerned about man and what man can achieve what rights he has what privileges he has how great is his freedom we want to go clear to the borderline of testing everything God ever told us was wrong

and trying it and seeing if it is wrong all because we don't fear God therefore we don't reverence what He says and that second issue is very powerful in Ecclesiastes not only fearing God but the fact that God will bring you and every work into judgment look back at chapter 3

again let's just trace that thought that God will bring us and every work into judgment in chapter 3 verse 15 it says that which is has already been and what is to be has already been and God requires an account of what is past verse 17 I said in my heart God shall judge the righteous and the wicked there shall be a time there for every purpose and for every work chapter 11 please verse 9 this whole idea of God judging in Ecclesiastes 11.9 but it says rejoice so young man in your youth let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes but know that for all these God will bring you into judgment powerful and chapter 12 verse 14 God will bring every work into judgment including every secret thing whether it is good or whether it

is evil boy awesome Noah Webster said that the greatest thought that ever controlled his life was his accountability to God went on to describe how man wants to flee from that that man even though he believes in it in the moments in which he's tested in pressure wants to run away from that that awesome thought that somehow God will bring me into account for the things that I have done and the message of Ecclesiastes is you can count on it we must remember our ultimate accountability to God thank God for the glorious gospel of Christ whereby Jesus our Lord bears our penalty and takes our judgment my friends God is going to have every one of us including believers give an account that isn't the sense of fear in the sense of loss of salvation to the believer but there is a sense of fear that

ought to belong to that question there is a time according to the Bible at the judgment seat of Christ when Christ will take what we have done and the Bible says whether good or bad and he will evaluate it praise God eternity is based on our faith in Jesus Christ but what will it mean is it the loss of reward and the loss of fulfillment the loss of joy what is it I don't understand all the questions but I know the fact the fact of both Old Testament and New Testament is that God will bring into account all things how he is going to do that and what the consequences are men and women debate over but the truth has to remain God is going to cause us to give an account to him every one of us Paul wrote to believers will give an account of himself to God whether it helps you to think of reward

in that sense or whether it means some sort of disappointment or sadness that is in the counsel of God I know the fact remains and what the culture is doing is running away from it fear God and know that he is going to bring you into judgment for everything you have said done or thought you say man that is kind of negative absolutely it is time we face some negatives in our life and understand that God wants to give us more joy than we ever knew was possible God wants you to go to work tomorrow and know that your life can be filled with joy no matter how many hassles and struggles and problems you face because you are properly related to him he is the one in control of the human heart and he can bring you joy even in the midst of trouble it is interesting when you get sick everybody is

sorry but there are a lot of blessings in being sick do you know that there are a lot of blessings and you know the thrill of having time to study nobody bothering you because you are sick they are all crying over you and weeping over you and I got thinking about I got just laughing with joy some days you know God has blessings in everything doesn't he a lot of it is our attitude let's face it it is what we see about what we go through and here he is the eternal God wanting to fill our lives with joy and what are we doing we are all hung up on all the worldly pursuits that he says are vanity now we are ready for the message in chapter 1 chapter 1 starts with a whole issue of the futility of life chapter 1 deals with the first purpose and that is to

reveal the futility of all earthly

pursuits the key verse of the whole book is in verse 2 vanity of vanities all is vanity 7 times in the book it says all is vanity 7 times in the book it says all is grasping for wind and that applies to everything under the sun which is used 26 times in the book everything under the sun means what is going on on earth there is a companion here in verse 3 when it says what profit has a man what advantage has a man from all his labor and Solomon will ask that question 3 times what is the profit to what we are doing what are we achieving by what we are doing and he is saying all is vanity vanity is translated even when it speaks of man being like a breath same word it speaks of man's dreams as fleeting fantasies in the book of Job and it is the same word when it speaks of something that is

absolutely nothing it is the same word the Hebrew word Hebel we get our Hebrew name Abel from something that is vanity it is temporary it is transitory it does not last and that is the theme of the whole book that life is what it is really all about all the things that we are trying to achieve it is vanity there is nothing there what you are after is not there what is behind it all is the eternal God who made it and knows why it is there interesting point I would turn it around and ask this question what is Solomon's answer to the question what profit is there of all these things look at chapter 2 and we will just give it to you quickly though we are going to go into great detail in our series but in chapter 2 verse 11 here is his first answer what profit what advantage is there to

everything you are doing in your life and the answer last phrase of verse 11 there was no profit under the sun but above the sun with God there is a lot of profit a lot of advantage you see the point under the sun all the activities of life what advantage is it to pursue all those things you are after them you are hot on it we call them climbers or whatever you see them everywhere what are you after what are you trying to achieve why do people have midlife crisis sometimes the simple point is because they haven't read Ecclesiastes and nobody put that in anybody's book yet you see if you read Ecclesiastes you wouldn't have a midlife crisis you'd have a young people's crisis a 30 crisis a 40 crisis a 50 a 60 you'd have a crisis your whole life because you'd learn that everything we are

pursuing is vain there is nothing to it there is no substance without the Lord it is zero time and when we come to Ecclesiastes that message is firmly implanted I would turn it around and ask this question is life worth living and if only to pursue these goodies that he talks about in Ecclesiastes then the answer would be no it's not that's the way Solomon deals with it is life really worth living if what I'm doing is pursuing all these little goodies and goals and things of life that I think will somehow bring me happiness if that's the motive if that's the reason then Solomon's answer is no and you're headed for a tragedy in your life at some point you will wake up some day and discover you were all wrong you didn't achieve it if only to make a profit if only to have greater knowledge

if only to have more pleasure etc etc the answer to the question is no life is not worth living let me quickly show you the reasons in verse 1 verse 4 I'd have to say because what you do doesn't last forever have you been able to deal with that yet I mean it's almost amusing it says one generation passes away another comes why it's empty why it's nothing is because what you do doesn't last forever so why are you so excited with what you do interesting isn't it secondly in verses 5 to 8 I like to call this or 5 to 7 I like to call this the restless ones the sun the wind and the rivers verse 5 you see the reason why life is meaningless if all you're doing is pursuing the things that life offers is because what you do does not satisfy and the illustration is in the sun wind and rivers the

sun rises it goes down and hastens to the place where it rose and you know something it's going to do that tomorrow again you say boy the writer wasn't too scientific because the sun does not rise hey don't you know what he's doing he's writing from a man's point of view only what we see life under the sun we're looking at life and we see everyday it looks like the sun's coming up even though I know the earth is rotating ok so the sun comes up and it goes down and you know you talk about boring monotonous that thing is going to do that again tomorrow and that's what he's saying there the restless ones the sun the wind and the rivers you talk about a problem the rivers run in the sea yet the sea never gets full and the place from which they come they return again you say well I don't

understand that's not typically that's just evaporation but have you ever thought about it this way boring you know what I mean boring I mean it's a process goes on all the time nothing is achieved and God says from the sun from the wind from the rivers we learn one lesson what you do does not satisfy do you understand hey I think about this in food I love eating man I think it's a great thing you know what I mean I think it's a great thing I hate people that don't like eating I don't know what it is they sit there and they say I don't like to eat you don't like to eat hey Ecclesiastes says you ought to enjoy it but you got to watch the fat right but hey loving what you eat I love to eat but you notice something you have a great meal and you feel so satisfied you say hey that did it man

permanent satisfaction no no no few hours I'm hungry again boring monotonous you see if you're really pursuing all these things Solomon is saying what you do doesn't last forever verse four and what you do does not satisfy verses five through eight but a third reason the reason why it's not worth living if that's your only goal is because what you do is not new now it takes old people to appreciate this it really does you know I think the older you get the more amusing it gets and when you get up in years and get a few gray hairs and you look back on life and you see all these people running around discovering these new things you just kind of smile yeah new sure nothing is new but to the guy that gets it he thinks it's so new hey I got this you won't believe it it's brand new and you

look at him and you say you've got to be kidding there's nothing new but you don't want to discourage the poor chap you know he's so thrilled with what he's discovered but it's not new it's just new to him Solomon says there's nothing new until you go into the sun verse 9 so what are you after? and then he has a fourth matter in verse 11 because what you do is not remembered like you think there's a lot of guys out there working their tails off thinking that somehow they're going to have a lasting remembrance hey people even forget what you did last year in the company let alone a lifetime and when a generation passes you think they're going to remember you? hey they're going to put up a little thing people even forget there's memorials all over the world to various people and what they

have done do you think people remember what they've done?

I've seen people disagree and argue over what somebody did that happened 20 years ago and he's dead now and in heaven we don't remember the mind is funny we forget we don't remember we don't have the lasting remembrance that's one of the funny things you can use tapes now to even demonstrate that people say I remember exactly what was said then you play the tape and say well I thought I did you know it's amazing the mind plays tricks on you and you think you remember something you don't and what the writer is saying is that all of life is futile because there's no remembrance of former things verse 11 nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after so why are you so hung up on trying to achieve things in this life and there's another factor in

verse 14 because what you learn will not change certain facts folks what you learn in life will not change certain things a lot of people think they will verse 15 what is crooked cannot be made straight and what is lacking cannot be numbered there's a lot of folks who think we're going to change things man we're going to change it I mean we're going to change it we can do it and then you read these testimonies of people who've started all kinds of stuff trying to change things and they wound up at the end of their life and saying there's nothing new under the sun and there's some things that cannot be changed now there are a lot of things that can be changed in terms of the mundane routine don't read too much into this we're talking about the basic facts that God has in the order and the

system of the universe there's some things that just don't change and you've got to live with it you've got to face it and one final thing as to why life is so futile when you look at the things in life and try to pursue it as if those things are the goal and that's because what you learn brings so much grief look at verse 18 for in much wisdom you want to know everything you want to go to school you want to be top in your class you want to know everything you better read this first in much wisdom is much grief and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow testimony of a friend of mine who decided he wanted to go into counseling he wanted to go into counseling he wanted to prepare himself he went to school he prepared himself he got all excited he learned all these things he was so

fascinated about human nature understanding people he got it all down man put out his little shingle and he's going to be a counselor he's going to really help people you know after about well it was almost two years but a little short of that after all this time being in it he was absolutely shocked with how he reacted to it he was so excited when he went to school learned all these great things about people and everything but you know what he found out he found out that Solomon was right in Ecclesiastes 1.18 that in much wisdom and increasing in knowledge brings much sorrow he said Dave there's a lot of sorrow out there in the world there's a lot of hurt there's a lot of pain and he says you start trying to deal with that man he says it really affects you emotionally and that's why you

really need the joy of God what are we after what are you seeking and Solomon's answers are to the futility of all earthly pursuits there is joy only in relating properly to God and ultimately we're going to be accountable to God himself did you think you could live without that did you think you could somehow survive even as a believer without seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness let's close with prayer father we look around us and see a world that's trying to find satisfaction and they're gone to everything under the sun sometimes when we sit back and look at it from God's point of view our hearts just ache for people we watch the misery the sorrow the frustration the disappointment the discouragement oh God our heavenly father our creator our rock and our fortress God

we ask you to help us to return our focus and our understanding back to you Lord I know this means repentance a change of mind and heart and attitude to stop looking at things merely horizontally and start looking at them vertically to stop worshipping ourselves and our own pursuits and start worshipping you help us father to start asking the right questions and God I pray for all of us who say we know you God help us help us father to understand we cannot live life without you some of us need to return to the God we say we love we thank you in Jesus name amen

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